

THE ACADEMIC ACCULTURATION OF NEWCOMER TEENS IN IOWA SCHOOLS:
A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

by

Calle A. W. Friesen

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fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
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Dissertation Committee:
Jill Johnson, Ph.D., Chair
Sally Beisser, Ph.D.
Shelley Fairbairn, Ph.D.

Dean of the School of Education:
Janet M. McMahonill, Ph.D.

Drake University

Des Moines, Iowa

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DEDICATION

To Byron Friesen my migration companion.
 I am grateful for your partnership as we shared the acculturation journey.
 With backpack babies we crossed borders and discovered together what it means
 to be newcomers, what it means to become American.
 My best and truest friend, wherever you are, I am home.

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ABSTRACT

Problem: New Americans enter Iowa in record numbers (Grey, 2013), with higher multilingual student populations expected over the next 20 years (Grey, 2013; Immigration Policy Center, 2013). As a result, Iowa schools face a growing need to understand teenage newcomer academic acculturation.

Procedures: This qualitative study explored the phenomenon of teenage newcomer academic acculturation through the lived experiences of 18 participants who entered the Iowa school system as refugee or immigrant newcomers during grades 7-12, representing 10 nationalities and 15 language groups. A grand tour question guided this study: What are the academic acculturation experiences of teenage newcomers in Iowa schools? Participants completed a narrative survey and engaged in focus group discussions with 3-5 other newcomers from various global origins. Data collection consisted of handwritten survey responses, verbatim focus group transcripts, and researcher field notes. Data analysis used an open coding approach (Creswell, 2003; Giorgi, 1997), appropriate for identification of key themes. Data were verified through member checks, triangulation, rich thick descriptions (Geertz, 1973), field notes, and reflexive journaling.

Findings: Data analysis revealed realities of Iowa newcomer academic acculturation experience as influenced by family, culture, schools, and relationships. The essence of newcomer experience emerged in 33 secondary themes and 9 major themes: family, culture, school personnel, school academics, relationships, newcomer mistreatment, culture shock, fear factors, and newcomer extremes.

Conclusion: Influences rooted in both the home society of origin and the school society of settlement impact newcomer's transitional experience to Iowa school culture. School climates of rejection and mistrust were fueled by negative relationships with general education teachers and encounters with bullying, prejudice, and discrimination. Positive experiences emerged for students with strong family support and freedom to adopt bicultural identity. School climates of acceptance and trust resulted when diversity was embraced by the school culture, accommodations for language acquisition were provided, and newcomers enjoyed positive relationships with school personnel.

Recommendations: Iowa educators should gain insight into personal biases that hinder acceptance of diversity and negatively impact newcomer student experience. Educators are encouraged to develop patience with newcomers through their English language acquisition and transition to Iowa culture. Teachers should monitor student assignment progress and completion until newcomers comprehend expectations of secondary contexts. Educators must learn about the cultural backgrounds of newcomer students. All content area teachers need to understand effective instructional modification and accommodations for language learners. School teams should consider flexible and innovative approaches to fostering relationships with newcomer families.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Acculturation comprehends those phenomena which result when groups of individuals having different cultures come into continuous first-hand contact, with subsequent changes in the original culture patterns of either or both groups. (Redfield, Limon, & Herskovits, 1936, p. 149)

Iowa classrooms are changing. New Americans are coming to Iowa in record numbers through both the refugee and immigrant experience (Grey, 2013). The cultural and linguistic makeup of Iowa schools is rapidly growing, with the number of residents born in other countries more than doubling between 1990 and 2000 (Grey, Woodrick, Yehieli, & Hoelscher, 2003). Latino and Asian newcomers comprise 4.4% of the state's population, making one in fifteen Iowans of Latino or Asian origin (Immigration Policy Center, 2013). As a result of increasing newcomer populations, Iowa has become the new gateway state (Grey, 2013), with some Iowa towns seeing 400% growth in Asian populations and 1,500% growth in Latino populations since 2000 (Grey, 2013). According to the Federation for American Reform (2013), the total foreign born population of Iowa in 2012 was 137,858, with 40,341 immigrant admissions between 2003-2012 and 13,332 incoming refugees during that same time frame. Meeting the educational needs of newcomer students from other countries has become a new, yet necessary focus for many Iowa school districts (Federation For American Reform, 2013; Grey, 1997, 2013; Immigration Policy Center, 2013; Iowa Department of Education, 2013). Table 1.1 presents examples of Iowa's prominent newcomer populations.

Table 1.1

Iowa's Prominent Newcomer Populations

Region of Origin	People Groups
South West Asia	Hmong, Vietnamese, Burmese
East Asia	Chinese
Former Soviet Union	Russian, Ukrainian
Mediterranean	Israeli
Africa	Sudanese, Rwandan, Somali
Central Pacific	Paulau, Marshall Islanders
Nepal	Nepali, Bhutanese, Karen
Middle East	Iraqi
North America	Mexican
Grey (2013)	

According to the Iowa Department of Education (2013), the number of students enrolled in Iowa schools totals 500,601. This total includes 23,820 students with Limited English Proficiency (LEP), accounting for 4.76% of Iowa's total PK-12 student population. Twenty-four of Iowa's 348 public school districts have LEP enrollments over 10%, with ten districts hosting the highest concentration of LEP populations; their non-native enrollment surpasses 15% each (Iowa Department of Education, 2013), as represented in Table 1.2.

Table 1.2

Highest Percentage of Limited English Proficient Students (LEP) by District

School District	PK-12 LEP	PK-12 Total	Percent LEP
Denison	1,210	2,287	52.91
Storm Lake	986	2,338	42.17
Marshalltown	1,745	5,056	34.51
Postville	178	589	30.22
Columbus Junction	206	828	24.88
West Liberty	244	1,231	19.82
West Sioux	146	747	19.54
Sioux City	2,508	14,293	17.35
Des Moines	5,467	33,278	16.43
Hampton-Dumont	197	1,272	15.49
Iowa Department of Education (2013)			

Several factors make academic acculturation extremely difficult. According to Lutheran Services of Iowa (Stuecker, 2006), an organization sponsoring refugee relocation until 2012, some challenges for families include (a) failure to understand the complexity of the public school system and not having the language skills, time, nor resources to learn; (b) inability to interact with teachers or participate in afterschool events due to language barriers and job demands; (c) not understanding report cards or the components needed for their children to be successful; (d) failure to understand the importance of homework, study time, and tests.

Refugees coming from certain cultures and educational systems view teachers as leaders or authorities not to be questioned or challenged. In many parts of the world, analytical thinking and exchange of ideas are not tolerated, and the primary method of learning is memorization and interrogation (Stuecker, 2006). As a result, many refugee students only speak when prompted; and both students and parents hesitate to initiate direct interaction with teachers. While Stuecker (2006), focuses on refugees, many of these characteristics are mirrored in immigrant students (Arzubiaga, Nogueron, & Sullivan, 2009) and may be evident to those serving newcomer students.

As a former secondary teacher working with newcomer students, I have observed many challenges presented by Stuecker (2006) and have been guilty of misunderstanding newcomer students and parents. Recognizing my understanding of the process of academic acculturation is limited to observation and experience from the teacher perspective, I have often wondered about the experiences of students and their perceptions of the acculturation process. I designed this qualitative study not only to add to the understanding of teenage newcomer experiences in Iowa but also to expand my own understanding of the phenomenon

and the ways in which students' *lived experiences* (Van Manen, 1990) influence successful transition to Iowa learning environments.

Statement of the Problem

As Iowa encounters new learners from around the globe, educators must be prepared with a better understanding of the acculturation process. Acculturation can involve group-level change impacting social structure, group politics, and economics. Acculturation can also be psychological, affecting individual sense of identity, values, or beliefs. Academic acculturation is the term used when newcomers experience these transitional phenomena in the school setting and this change influences their ability to be educated. Drawing upon definitions provided by Berry, Phinney, Sam, and Vedder (2006) as well as Berry, Poortinga, and Pandey (1997), academic acculturation is defined as the change in an individual or institution occurring as a result of contact with a different culture within the school context.

Successful transition of newcomers entering Iowa schools can be expedited or compromised if teachers do not have a clear understanding of student needs and a willingness to acknowledge their own role in the academic acculturation process. When teachers lack insight and understanding of the refugee experience, they frequently misinterpret students' and parents' culturally inappropriate attempts to succeed in their new school environment (Hones, 1999; Lee, 2002; McBrien, 2005; Trueba, 1990). Cultural misunderstandings can fuel prejudice and discrimination, further complicating the challenges of students already struggling with confusing cultural changes and unfamiliar language (Fisher, Wallace, & Fenton, 2000; McBrien, 2005; Ogbu, 1982; Olson, 2000). Discrimination adversely affects the process of acculturation for both refugees and immigrants and poses the greatest barrier to adaptation of newcomers (Portes, 2001).

Iowa's populations of incoming multilingual students are expected to increase exponentially over the next 20 years (Grey, 2013; Immigration Policy Center, 2013). As classroom demographics continue to change, researchers must investigate acculturation by looking at the phenomenon from a perspective not yet considered in Iowa schools: the students'. This study looks to uncover the challenges of acculturation from the student perspective by asking: What are the academic acculturation experiences of teenage newcomers in Iowa schools?

Purpose

Today, Iowa educators need to view acculturation as not a mere construct but rather a lived experience. Teachers can learn much from the narrative accounts of those who have lived the academic acculturation experience and willingly share their stories. Through narrative surveys and focus groups, this qualitative study seeks to provide insight into the phenomenon of academic acculturation with the goal of unveiling the realities of acculturation from the student perspective. The description of lived academic acculturation experiences of teenage newcomer students in Iowa schools will contribute to the current literature base.

Research Questions

My research will be guided by the following "grand tour" (Spradley, 1979) research question: What are the academic acculturation experiences of teenage newcomers in Iowa schools? As this primary question is explored, the inquiry will investigate sub-questions that include:

- How does family influence academic acculturation?
- How does culture influence academic acculturation?

- How do relationships influence academic acculturation?
- How do schools influence academic acculturation?

Significance of the Study

The current literature on newcomer students addresses a variety of compelling and important topics. One pertinent area of research concerns the psycho-social needs of newcomers, specifically psychological health and socio-emotional well-being of students (Ascher, 1985; Bankston & Zhou, 2002; Fernandez-Kelly & Curran, 2001; Mosselson, 2006; Olson, 2000; Sokoloff, Carlin, & Pham, 1984). Another topic of investigation in the K-12 school setting involves English language acquisition (Deem & Marshall, 1980; Gebhard, 2002; Link & Phelan, 2001; Nicassio, 1983; Olson, 2000; Pryor, 2001; Rumbaut & Portes, 2001).

Researchers address the topic of improper classroom placement with specific focus on non-English proficient students inappropriately selected for Special Education services (Arzubiaga, Nogueron, & Sullivan, 2009) or placed in low academic track programs (Allen & Franklin, 2002; Suárez-Orozco, 1989; Trueba, 1990). Research on K-12 student acculturation (Ascher, 1985; Erikson, 1968; Tollefson, 1990) reveals parental factors which may hinder student transition. Intergenerational stress and identity confusion when encountering a school culture in opposition with the native culture in the home transpire as problematic factors, along with the spiritual beliefs of the family and parent beliefs about authority (Eisenbruch, 1988; Smith-Hefner, 1990; Trueba, 1990).

Within the literature, researchers also explore another socio-emotional concern: the experience of welcome versus rejection and the many forms of prejudice and discrimination faced by refugee and immigrant students (Gibson, 1998; Gibson & Ogbu, 1991; Olson,

2000). Olson (2000) confronts policies that expect students to learn English quickly, while Gibson (1998) challenges the notion that use of a child's native language in school inhibits the child's education progress. Additionally, the current research surrounding prejudice and discrimination reveals fear as a primary catalyst for distrust of newcomers (Stephan & Stephan, 2000; Stepick, Stepick, Eugene, & Teed, 2001). Events in recent history may further fuel the fear factor, causing some to view certain religions as oppressive or equate certain world regions with terrorism, thus making hate crimes another topic explored in the literature (Kirova, 2001; Link & Phelan, 2001; McBrien, 2005). Collectively the factors of welcome and rejection as well as various misunderstandings fueling mistrust contribute to negative prejudgment of newcomers.

Typically considered a sociological, psychological, and anthropological construct, acculturation is not targeted for investigation as often in educational research at the K-12 level. While many studies relate to refugee and immigrant newcomers, research specific to academic acculturation in the secondary school context is limited.

A review of the literature reveals no research on academic acculturation involving Iowa student participants. In addition, the qualitative nature of this study looks at academic acculturation through a new paradigmatic lens; existing research on ESL¹ success tends to rely on quantitative data related to student assessment outcomes. Few qualitative studies on this topic exist, and I found no evidence of a phenomenological study in which students self-report their *lived experiences* (Van Manen, 1990) with the academic acculturation process.

This timely study will serve Iowa educators as they prepare for the challenges of larger multi-lingual newcomer student populations, specifically adolescent students. This study

¹ English as a Second Language.

² English Language Learner.

³ First language.

⁴ The distinction between *ELL* and *ESL* may prove helpful in reading this section. The U.S.

includes student participants from across the state as well as from multiple regions of the globe, all with *lived experiences* as newcomers in one of the ten Iowa communities identified as having the highest concentrations of LEP learners. Acculturation is not an easy process; and with so much change happening rather quickly in Iowa, some new insights come to light. Research on Iowa's academic acculturation holds the potential to enlighten the collective understanding of student experience resulting in more cultural responsiveness to newcomers—an urgent need in districts experiencing exponential growth of newcomer populations.

Conceptual Framework

Utilizing Acculturation Theory as the primary framework, this study builds on Berry's (1997) model of acculturation applied to the school context. Berry's Acculturation Framework has been central to many studies in anthropology, sociology, and psychology disciplines. However, few, if any, applications of this model occur in educational research. According to Berry's model, newcomers may have different individual responses to acculturation, balancing the value of maintaining the old culture with adapting to a new one. The choice of one response over another can change depending on shifting stressors and individual factors. Berry's framework matches with this study as the model recognizes foundational influences introduced by two sources: the individual's society of origin and the society of settlement. Berry's model centers on a culture-behavior relationship in which "individuals generally act in ways that correspond to cultural influences and expectations" (Berry, 1997, p. 6). This study looks specifically at the influences of family, culture, relationships, and school in the acculturation process. Figure 1.1 offers a visual representation of the model I created for this study, based upon Berry's framework.

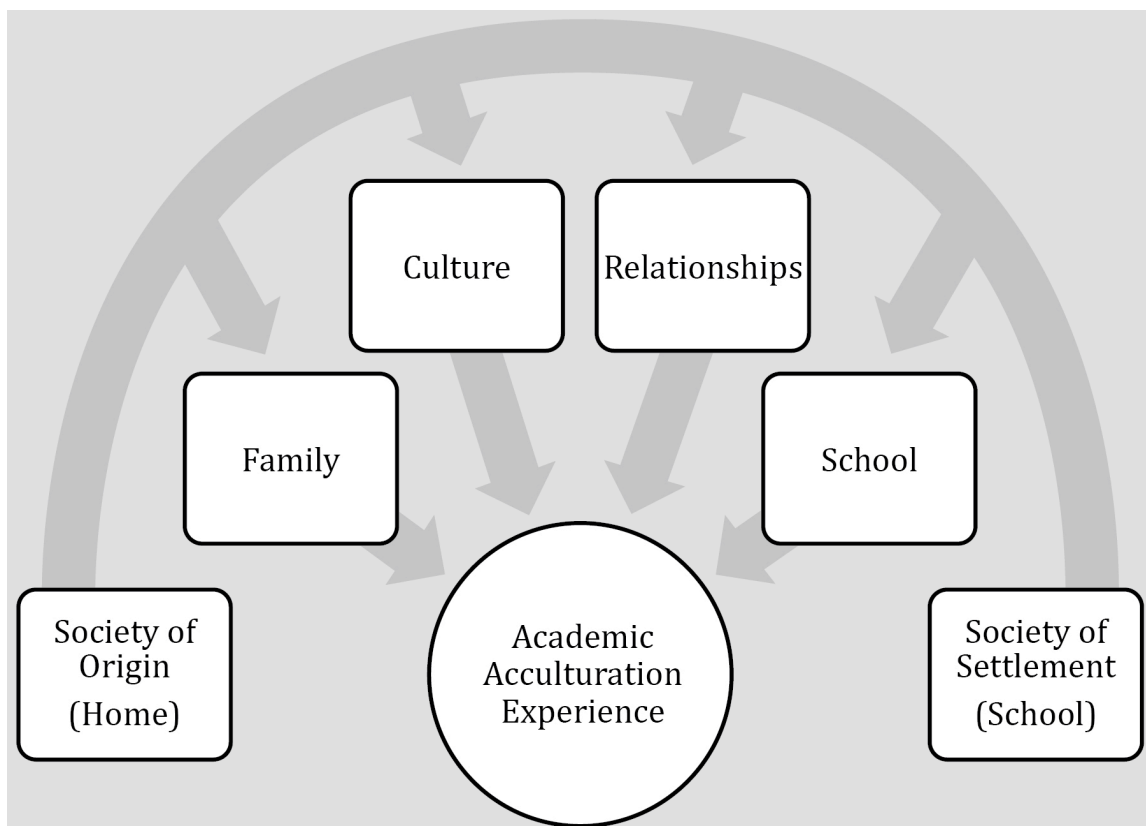


Figure 1.1 Conceptual Model of Influences on Academic Acculturation. Original design of the author, adapted from: Berry 1997, Berry et al., 2006; Sam & Berry, 2010.

According to Berry (1997), society of origin represents the cultural characteristics accompanying the individual into the acculturation process—the result of home influences such as family, language, culture—and extends to relationships inside and outside the home as well as to school. These influences play a significant role in the individual’s preparation and readiness for acculturation and “the degree of voluntariness in the migration motivation of acculturating individuals” (Berry, 1997, p. 16). Newcomers experience acculturation on a continuum between reactive and proactive, depending on negative constraining or reactionary messages, or positive motivating messages from the society of origin; these contrasting factors are sometimes referred to as push/pull factors (Berry, 1997).

In a similar manner, the society of settlement represents the cultural characteristics of the host environment the individual encounters upon contact with a new culture. Historical and attitudinal perspectives of immigration and pluralism form this environment (Berry, 1997). While several iterations of Berry's (1997) conceptual framework exist, one representation consists of four possible acculturation strategies for adjusting to the society of settlement: integration, assimilation, separation, and marginalization. These strategies discussed in the literature review of chapter 2 and presented in Figure 2.3 reveal connections between how newcomers are treated by the host society and how they respond as a result of that treatment. Some societies accept newcomers and support cultural diversity, a position representing a positive multicultural ideology corresponding with the integration strategy. Other societies seek to eliminate diversity by enforcing assimilation, segregation, or marginalization of newcomers. Iowa schools represent the society of settlement in this study, where significant influences include school factors and relationships, extending to home influences of culture and family.

Researcher Positionality

My interest in this investigation began as a result of serving Iowa students as a secondary English Language Arts teacher. As a classroom teacher, I experienced the growing influx of teenage refugee and immigrant learners arriving with notable gaps in educational preparation. Refugee students were placed in high school grade sections because of age and other development indicators, yet these students had little or no formal educational background due to volatile past circumstances and lack of educational resources in refugee camps. Similarly, I encountered immigrant students with limited English proficiency muddling through the challenges of high school with limited understanding of content in

general education classrooms, clinging to the sense of safety provided in the isolated ELL² environments. Typically, school personnel place immigrant and refugee students in Language Instruction Education Programs (LIEPs) regarding newcomers as a common population, distinguished by the Iowa English Language Development Assessment (I-ELDA) level of language acquisition proficiency. As a general education teacher, I noticed distinctive differences in the disposition and motivation of refugee students compared with immigrant students; yet my understanding of these differences was subjective and limited. However, distinctions between the refugee and immigrant experience are important in understanding the challenges of acculturation. For this reason, I specify *refugee* or *immigrant* populations when differences and distinctions are relevant, and I use the term *newcomers* to indicate the collective group of acculturating students when appropriate.

My impressions of student challenges during the acculturation experience were limited to observation only. I suspected that if newcomer students were able to speak for themselves, the aspects of acculturation they found most daunting might differ significantly from what I would have concluded based on observation alone. Moustakas (1994) holds to the idea of bracketing, during which the researcher must set aside his/her own experiences to approach the phenomenon with a fresh perspective. Creswell (2013) admits true removal of self is hard to achieve, but phenomenological researchers are advised to “begin a project by describing their own experiences with the phenomenon and bracketing out their views before proceeding with the experiences of others” (p. 80). Following Creswell’s cue, I acknowledge that I am also an immigrant who, after twelve years of residency in the United States, became a naturalized citizen in 2011. Unlike the refugee and immigrant participants in this study, I

² English Language Learner.

came to the United States from a homeland country possessing similar societal characteristics to most Western civilizations and share the typical Anglo foundation of the Midwest.

Additionally, my own migration did not occur until my adult years, removing my personal acculturation experience from the compounding academic high school context of this study.

For this reason, my own immigration from Canada does not directly compare with the experiences of participants in the study, making it easier for me to bracket my own experience and focus on the phenomenon under examination.

As an Iowa educator, I previously taught in a school district with a high concentration of refugee and immigrant students. However, my role as an English language arts and literature teacher narrowed my interaction with refugee and immigrant students to those with high enough English proficiency levels to participate in courses such as American Literature or Creative Writing. This specific type of interaction in the general education classroom limited, to an extent, my perspective on the acculturation experience and my insight into the phenomenon addressed in this study.

Definition of Terms

In the American context, refugee and immigrant students are often lumped into the educational subcategory of English Language Learners (ELLs). However, this population of students does not fit into one simplified heterogeneous strand. Many researchers (Foster, 2004; Gibson, 1998; Ogbu 1992), distinguish the differences between newcomers when examining acculturation. Thus, I will specify key terms for the purpose of better understanding the content of this report.

An immigrant is an individual who has taken up permanent residence in a culture or nation not their native homeland. Two kinds of immigrants can be distinguished: voluntary

immigrants who have freely chosen to relocate and involuntary immigrants who have relocated against their will. Ogbu (1982) posits that voluntary immigrants are more apt to view adopting language and practices of the dominant culture as desirable avenues to success in the host country; whereas, people who immigrate against their will may view conformity to a new culture as a rejection or disaffiliation with their own culture. The students represented in our study likely come from a mix of voluntary and involuntary positions.

A refugee is a person who flees a foreign country or power to escape danger or persecution. According to the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, a refugee is person who

owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion is outside the country of his (her) nationality, and is unable to or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself (herself) of the protection of that country. (United Nations High Commission for Refugees, 2000, p. 14).

Additionally, a refugee has been granted asylum in the United States. Ogbu (1982) considers refugees as semi-voluntary immigrants who fall into a middle category between voluntary and involuntary, thus displaying sentiment of both groups.

This investigation uses the term newcomer as the collective representation of both refugee and immigrant students. The difference between refugee and immigrant has been explained by definition, noting distinctions between the two groups. A more thorough discussion of refugee and immigrant distinction is included in chapter two. While newcomers may hold different views, motivations, and apprehensions about the acculturation experience based on refugee or immigrant backgrounds (Cheng & Fox, 2008; Ogbu, 1982), those

distinctions may or may not be specific to my current inquiry. For this reason, I have adopted the term newcomer to indicate the collective group of students transitioning to American culture and Iowa schools but will specify refugee or immigrant when the distinction is pertinent.

Summary

This study investigates the *lived experiences* of teenage newcomers acculturating to Iowa schools. Both the society of origin and the society of settlement significantly influences the acculturation process. This investigation utilizes Berry's Acculturation Framework to support a model for understanding the newcomer experience by looking at the ways in which family, language, culture, relationships, and schools influence the academic acculturation experience. This timely study seeks to address a dearth in the literature by focusing on two distinct gaps: first, the experience of academic acculturation of secondary students; and second, academic acculturation to Iowa schools.

Chapter two presents the definitional and theoretical foundations of Academic Acculturation expanding on Berry's Acculturation Framework (1997, 2003) and a review of the literature pertaining to newcomer acculturation. I have also included a discussion of the Iowa context and the significant characteristics impacting Iowa acculturation.

Chapter three details the qualitative research approach, epistemological assumptions, and methodology of this phenomenological study. I also discuss the methodology adopted for participant sampling, data collection, and data analysis procedures along with ethics, and design issues pertaining to qualitative inquiry. Consideration of the potential limitation and delimitations will be addressed, along with a discussion of my positionality as the researcher.

In chapter four, I present the migration journeys of participants leading them to Iowa settlement. Themes uncovered during data analysis supply a framework for developing a greater understanding of the teenage newcomer experience in Iowa schools. Through rich thick descriptions (Geertz, 1973; Denzin, 1989) taken from participants' verbatim accounts, I report findings based on analysis of the data pertaining to the research questions of this phenomenological study.

Discussion in chapter five considers the findings presented in chapter four, featuring the positive and negative lived experiences of newcomer teens, recommendations for educators, and implications for future research. I conclude the report with personal reflection on the qualitative process and my own learning as I engaged in this important research.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review is divided into three sections to help establish a foundation for effective research involving the acculturation of teenage newcomer students. Part I presents an overview of acculturation to provide the reader with an understanding of definitions and the theoretical foundations of Acculturation. Part II explores current literature addressing the research questions of this study: how do the influences of family, culture, relationships, and school affect academic acculturation? In Part III, the reader gains an understanding of the Iowa context and the implications of increased newcomer populations. Figure 2.1 presents a visual map of this chapter's organization.

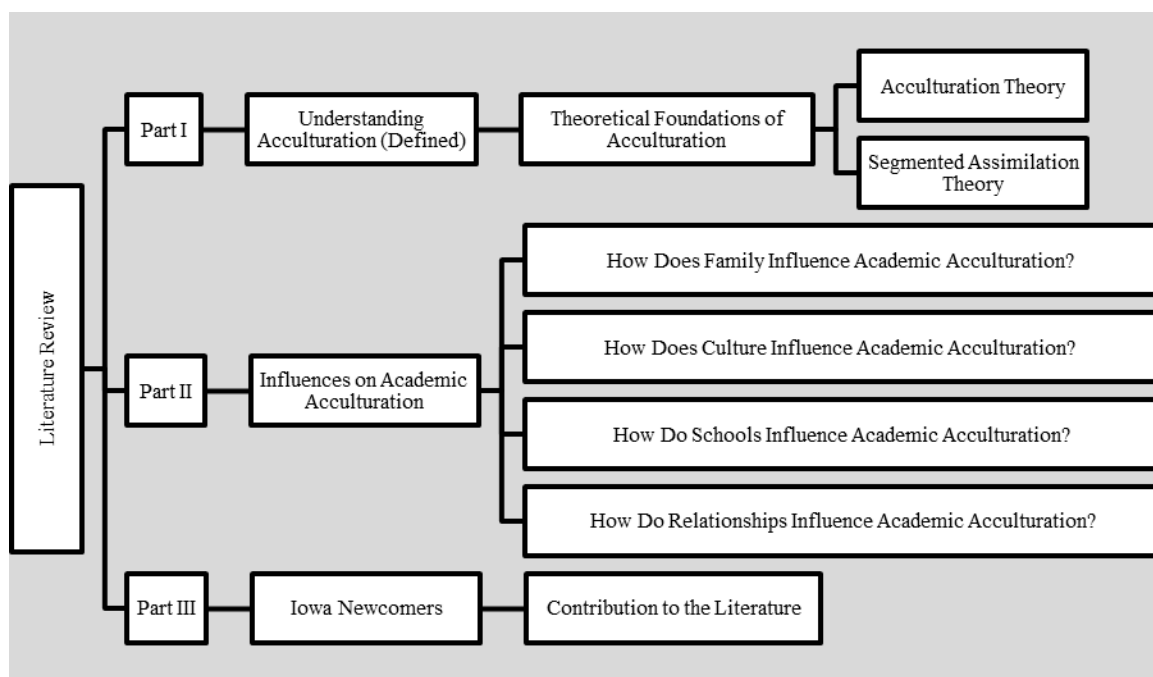


Figure 2.1. Academic Acculturation in Iowa: Organization of Literature Review.

Throughout this chapter, the terms refugee and immigrant are used as indicated in the literature reviewed; some studies referenced may pertain to one, the other, or both. This chapter will often make distinctions between refugee and immigrant, critical as each

identifier carries important implications (Foster, 2004; Ogbu, 1982, 1992). Some of the research concerning adolescents focuses on assimilation, one of the four primary strategies in Berry's model of acculturation (refer to Fig. 2.3). For this reason, the term assimilation may occur with prevalence in sections where that terminology pertains to the literature under review.

Considerable research has been devoted to understanding acculturation through the lens of adult immigration, as noted by Berry (1997) and Sam and Berry (2006). However, research addressing the phenomenon of acculturation among youth is less prevalent (Berry et al., 2006; Erikson, 1968; Garcia Coll & Marks, 2009; Suárez-Orozco, & Todorova, 2003). In a review of the literature, I found only half a dozen national studies pertaining to acculturation of newcomer teenagers (Fuligni, 1997; Keskin, 2013; Portes & Zhou, 1993; Rumbaut & Portes, 2001; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2009; Zhou, 1997). Only one study looks at adolescent acculturation in the Midwest (Schwartz, Zamboanga, & Jarvis, 2007), and no literature could be found specifically investigating acculturation in Iowa schools.

Since the bulk of research on acculturation falls outside the field of education, this review of literature is limited to qualitative and quantitative studies examining some aspect of refugee and/or immigrant experience related to education and/or school experience with acculturation as at least an implied, if not specifically indicated, theme.

Part I: Understanding Acculturation

This section begins by defining academic acculturation according to literature from multiple disciplines. The branches of acculturation are then defined to help identify the different individuals who experience acculturation. Finally, acculturation strategies and

responses are presented to extend reader understanding of how newcomer response to acculturation might be manifested in school settings.

The transition of newcomers from one place to another spurs the emergence of culturally plural societies (Kymlicka, 2000), where individuals and groups must adopt strategies to successfully adapt to living interculturally. The earliest classic definition of acculturation comes from Redfield, Limon, and Herskovits (1936), who state that “acculturation comprehends those phenomena which result when groups of individuals having different cultures come into continuous first-hand contact, with subsequent changes in the original culture patterns of either or both groups” (p. 149).

According to Berry (2003, 2006), acculturation is the process of cultural and psychological change that follows intercultural contact where cultural adaptations include changes in group customs, economics and politics, and psychological changes. These changes may manifest in alterations to individual attitudes toward acculturation, or in shifts in cultural identity, social behavior, and/or relationships (Berry, 2003, 2006).

Newcomers face uncertainty most intensely at the initial stage of introduction to the new culture, with confusion and adjustment problems reducing gradually over time. Schuetz (1944) calls this introductory phase that of the *immigrant stranger* (p.499). Oberg (1960) refers to this initial phase as *culture shock*, which he identifies as an “occupational disease... the anxiety that results from losing all of our familiar signs and symbols of social intercourse” (p. 177). This initial adjustment phase, regardless of label, commences the acculturation experience.

Acculturation has many definitions, depending on the disciplinary focus. The Social Science Research Council (1954) defined acculturation as:

the culture change that is initiated by the conjunction of two or more autonomous cultural systems. Its dynamics can be seen as the selective adaptation of value systems, the processes of integration and differentiation, the generation of developmental sequences, and the operation role determinants and personality factors. (p. 974)

Acculturation is defined by Marden (1973) as the change that occurs when an individual's primary learning in one culture is overruled by taking on traits of another culture. Marden's (1973) monistic example implies that change occurs primarily in the newcomer, illustrating common confusion between the terms assimilation and acculturation. Assimilation is defined as "the absorption and integration of people, ideas, or culture into a wider society or culture" and "becoming conformed to" (Simpson & Weiner, 1989, p. 714). Assimilation assumes the newcomer will change in ways that imitate and emulate the host culture, rejecting characteristics of the society of origin to become like the prominent model in the society of settlement. Conversely, acculturation recognizes change is necessary in order for newcomers to successfully adjust to life in a new culture but does not specify what form the change will take.

Theoretical Foundations of Acculturation

The study of academic acculturation involves a union of theoretical perspectives from psychology, sociology, cultural studies, and education. While Acculturation Theory is the primary framework for this study, Segmented Assimilation Theory also holds an important place in understanding the acculturation experience.

Acculturation Theory

In some psychological models, acculturation is based on a binary conceptualization that acculturation occurs when the individual's cultural identification with the society of

settlement increases and identification with the society of origin decreases (Skuzza, 2007).

This view relies on a single direction of change, perpetuating the belief that change only occurs to the newcomer and not to the society of settlement. Multidimensional acculturation models acknowledging acculturation as a construct of reciprocal change do exist and may include dimensions such as language, loyalty, and relationships (Skuzza, 2007). The relationship among these dimensions reveals acculturative struggles in the ways that loyalty to the origin culture might perpetuate sustained homeland relationships or that acquisition of settlement language might provide avenues for new relationships in the settlement culture but threaten loyalty to the society of origin. These multidimensional models used in psychology limit inquiry to the assumption that people will be somewhere between cultures on each dimension (Skuzza, 2007). Further definitions confirm that change occurs in both the personal perception of home culture and in the actual culture of settlement.

Redfield, Limon, and Herskovits (1936) determine “acculturation comprehends those phenomena which result when groups of individuals having different cultures come into continuous first-hand contact with subsequent changes in the original cultural patterns of either or both groups” (p. 149). This definition suggests the practice of acculturating tends to induce change, with the greater change likely experienced by the acculturating group (Skuzza, 2007).

While the above definitions seem straightforward, acculturation theory itself proves rather complicated. Embedded within the theory is the understanding that newcomers arrive with diverse histories and migration motivations; this aspect of acculturation theory respects differing branches of newcomer minorities (Ogbu, 1992). Acculturation theory also respects differing strategies and responses individuals may adopt during the acculturation process

(Berry, 1997; Gibson, 1998). When studying teenage acculturation, another important aspect of theory relates specifically to adolescent response, which Berry (1997) described in biodimensional profiles. Together, a newcomer's minority branch, strategies, and responses to acculturation and biodimensional profile work together to describe the academic acculturation experience. Figure 2.2 illustrates the relationship between these individual aspects.

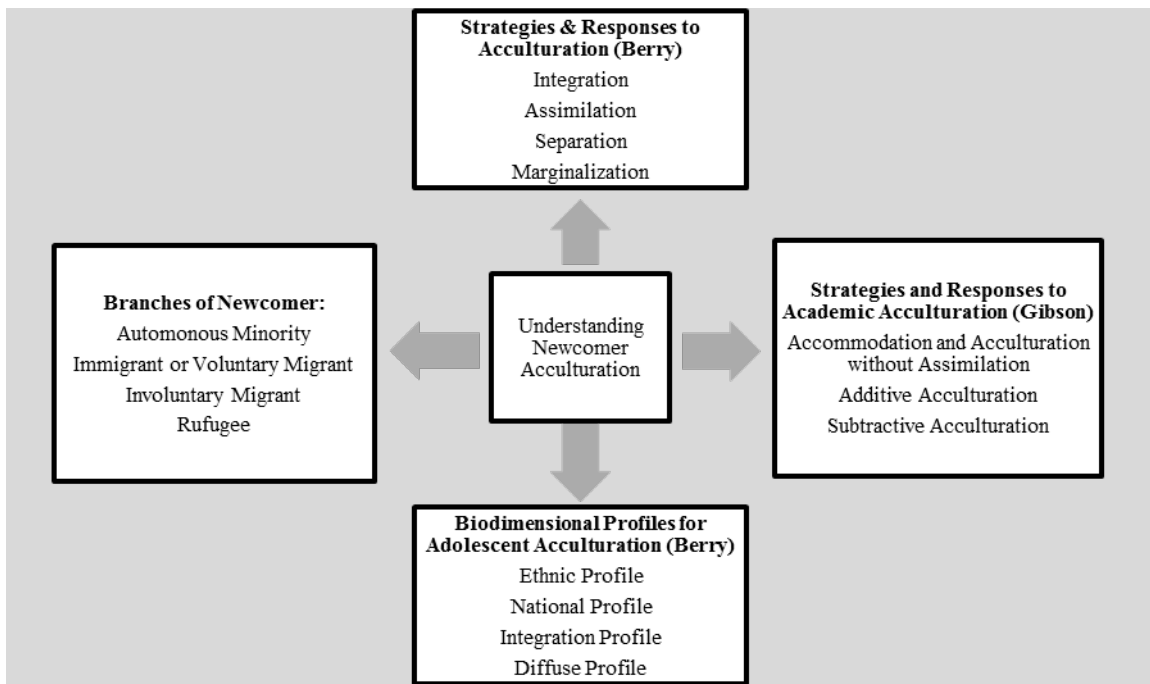


Figure 2.2. Understanding Acculturation Theory. Adapted from: Berry 1997; Gibson, 1998; Ogbu 1992.

Branches of newcomer minorities. Among the most consistently articulated aspects of acculturation theory is the idea that to understand the academic acculturation of minority students, a person must distinguish among different kinds of minorities (Ogbu, 1991). Researchers categorize differing branches of minorities into autonomous minority, immigrant, voluntary minority, involuntary minority, and refugee. Each branch holds its own unique motivations and apprehensions towards adjustment in a new society of origin.

Newcomers are not autonomous in their approach to adjustment, and not all newcomers acculturate; therefore, clarifying the differences among branches proves helpful.

Autonomous minorities. This branch includes individuals who may be culturally or linguistically distinct but who are not politically, socially, or economically subordinated to major degrees. These minorities often experience relatively high rates of school success (Foster, 2004; Ogbu, 1982, 1992). As a Canadian immigrant, I associate with this the categorization of newcomer.

Immigrant or voluntary minorities. These individuals have moved to the United States voluntarily believing relocation offers better life quality, economic possibility, and/or political freedom (Foster, 2004; Ogbu, 1992). According to Ogbu (1982, 1992), even though members of this group experience subordination, the positive expectations they bring with them influence their perceptions of American society and schools, and “their children do not usually experience disproportionate and persistent problems in social adjustment and academic achievement” (Ogbu, 1992, p. 290).

Involuntary minorities. Individuals who arrive in the United States against their will because of slavery, conquest, or colonization in their home country, without the option of returning to or maintaining ties with their homeland experience the most difficulty with school adjustment (Ogbu, 1992). This group displayed a distrust of those who control societal institutions and frames of reference which lead them to interpret differences they encounter in school as symbols of oppression and to “consciously and/or unconsciously avoid crossing cultural and language boundaries” (Ogbu, 1992, p. 291). According to Ogbu (1992), this group is most likely to “demand or need culturally compatible curriculum,

teaching and learning styles, communication style, and interactional style, rather than accept the school counterparts” (p. 191).

Refugees. According to Ogbu (1992), this branch does not consist of immigrant or voluntary minorities and are subject to a great deal of misunderstanding. A refugee is a person who flees a foreign country or power to escape danger or persecution (United Nations High Commission for Refugees, 2000) and has asylum in the United States. The circumstances of migration may have been involuntary, but the desire for freedom and asylum resonates with the voluntary mindset. Ogbu (1982) considers refugees as semi-voluntary immigrants who fall into a middle category between voluntary and involuntary, displaying sentiment of both groups and complicating the acculturation experience.

According to many researchers (Foster, 2004; Gibson, 1998; Gibson & Ogbu, 1991; and Ogbu, 1982, 1992), examining acculturation must include distinguishing the differences among newcomers. The definitions of the terms *voluntary immigrant*, *involuntary immigrant*, and *refugee* suggest differing cultural models, cultural language frames, degrees of trust, and educational strategies. Under these circumstances, Ogbu (1992) cautions some districts populated by students with involuntary minority mindset might “produce a strong verbal endorsement of schooling as a means of getting ahead, yet find very weak culturally sanctioned attitudes, efforts, and persistence supporting individual pursuit of school success” (p. 191).

According to Ogbu (1992), voluntary and involuntary minorities are not only different in the way they incorporate into American society but also in their cultural models of what it means to be a minority, how to get ahead, and the role education plays in achieving goals. Additionally, voluntary and involuntary minorities differ in the degree to which they

trust or distrust Americans and American institutions as well as differ in their collective frame of reference for judging appropriate behavior, affirming group membership and solidarity (Ogbu, 1992). For these reasons, school personnel must acknowledge that significant differences exist between immigrant and refugee newcomers—differences which can pose challenges to academic acculturation. My study focuses on the experiences of newcomers with the understanding that student participants may represent a combination of autonomous minorities and students with voluntary and involuntary mindsets, from both refugee and immigrant backgrounds.

Acculturation strategies & responses. As newcomers adapt to a new society, they employ active strategies in the acculturation process. Berry (1997) describes different responses newcomers may adopt in response to acculturation. While several iterations of Berry's (1997) conceptual framework exist, one representation consists of four possible acculturation strategies, as depicted in Figure 2.3: integration, assimilation, separation, and marginalization.

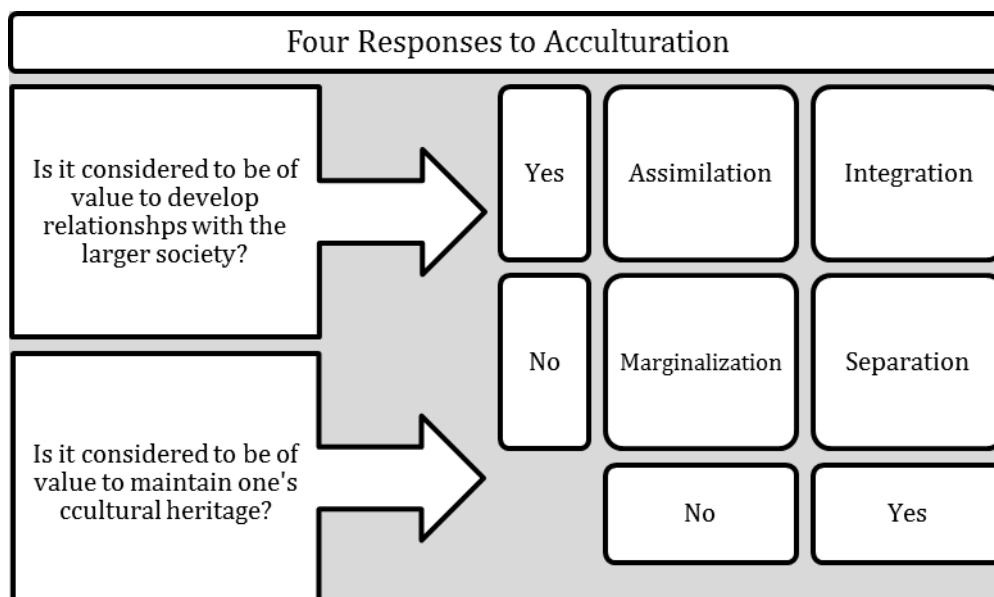


Figure 2.3. Berry's Four Responses to Acculturation. Adapted from Berry, 1997.

Integration. Integration occurs when ties to original culture are intact and secure, thus efforts to integrate with other cultures are made intentionally (Berry, 1997). In order for integration to happen, both the non-dominant and the dominant cultural group must be ready for cultural diversity (Berry, 1997). Integration, the acculturative approach taken by individuals who value maintaining indigenous culture and intergroup relations, is conditioned on the act of reciprocation and necessitates joint accommodation of both groups to the idea that each group, the dominant and the non-dominant, has the right to be different (Berry, 1997). Those who practice integration strategies tend to experience the fewest difficulties in adaptation as they retain their original culture while accepting a new culture (Berry, 1997). Those who adopt an integration approach blend the two cultures on a relational level and manage to successfully participate in both cultures.

Assimilation. Culture shedding, or assimilation, takes place when the individual loses his or her cultural identity voluntarily and seeks out interactions with other groups (Berry, 1997). Assimilation most often results when a newcomer rejects his/her own cultural identity and adopts qualities of the host culture. With strategies quite similar to Marden's (1973) definition, acculturation equals the change occurring when an individual's primary learning in one culture is overruled by taking on traits of another culture. In assimilation, the individual rejects the culture of origin and embraces the society of settlement.

Separation. Employing this strategy, an individual maintains his or her original culture and evades interactions with other cultures (Berry, 1997). These newcomers are referred to in literature as separatists and are the least likely to acculturate successfully to the school setting—in other words, the original culture is retained and the new culture rejected (Sam & Berry, 2010).

Marginalization. Marginalization, an outcome of being faced with involuntary assimilation or forced exclusion, occurs when the newcomer values neither culture maintenance nor intergroup relations and therefore withdraws from both groups. Marginalization may occur when the newcomer has little chance of cultural maintenance and little interest in relating with others, often due to exclusion or discrimination (Berry, 1997). Marginalization results from newcomers' rejection of both the society of origin and the society of settlement.

In a similar manner, Gibson (1998), who identified three strategies used by newcomers, speaks directly to acculturation within the school context, proving meaningful to my study. Gibson's (1998) strategies include *accommodation and acculturation without assimilation*, *additive acculturation*, and *subtractive acculturation*.

Accommodation and acculturation without assimilation. In this approach, parents make accommodations to permit change for their children to acquire competence in American schools and become competitive in the new society, but not at the expense of losing their heritage identity. Parents tend to urge their children to accommodate to the rules and expectations of the new environment, but an explicit refusal to assimilate fully into the host culture underlies their support (Gibson, 1988, 1998). Parents fear individual assimilation and loss of identification with one's former group. Gibson (1998) finds those who advocate accommodation and acculturation without assimilation are proud to become American citizens but resist adopting an Americanized identity (Gibson, 1988). Students become skillful in navigating the dominant culture; however, this strategy often causes conflict in the family as "parents tend more toward accommodation and the children toward acculturation"

(Gibson, 1998, p. 623). The concerned newcomer parent mistakenly interprets any change in the student due to the acculturation process as assimilation.

Additive acculturation. Students adopt this strategy so that, rather than replacing old identity with a new one, they take on skills of the new culture and language as an added set of tools to be incorporated into the student's existing cultural repertoire (Gibson & Bhachu, 1988; Gibson & Ogbu, 1991; Valenzuela, 1997). In this approach, influences from society of origin such as family, culture, language, and religion continue to be fostered along with growth in culture and language learning of the society of settlement. Students of adopting this strategy often become multicultural and multilingual and adopt a more-is-better approach to acquiring new languages and multicultural understandings.

Subtractive acculturation. At times, students are encouraged to leave behind their foreign ways and dismiss their home language. In this approach, "home language is not nurtured in its own right; rather it is seen as a temporary tool to help children make the transition to an English-only curriculum" (Gibson, 1998, p. 623). Newcomer buy-in strongly influences the branch of acculturation to which newcomers may subscribe, which differs significantly depending on the background and conditions preceding arrival in the U.S. (Gibson & Ogbu, 1991). The general sentiment of subtractive acculturation is to dismiss home language and culture as these are barriers that hold newcomers back (Valenzuela, 1997). In subtractive environments, English-only is preferred and students are generally not permitted to use their native language.

Berry's Theoretical Framework of Acculturation

As indicated earlier, predominantly anthropology and sociology fields have generated research on acculturation, with some contributions from political science and economics.

However, the psychological perspective on culture change provides the human element, informing theoretical perspectives in educational research. As the seminal researcher of acculturation, Berry (1997) addresses two distinct sets of variables for studying acculturation: societal level variables and individual level variables. Societal level variables account for factors influencing acculturation both in the society of origin and in the society of settlement. Berry holds societal level variables determine the foundational conditions affecting cultural contact within a new context.

Berry (1980) outlines three courses or steps in the acculturation process: contact, conflict, and adaptation. Contact is key to transition; the nature of the contact with a new society, the purpose, and duration of that contact all contribute to the acculturation experience. Berry (1980) claims acculturation is least successful when contact is short-lived or without a driving purpose and most successful when purpose is clear and deliberate strategies for success are adopted.

Berry et al. (2006) conducted one of the few large-scale international studies on acculturation and adaptation, involving almost 8,000 immigrant youth aged 13-18 years settling in 13 societies, using quantitative methodology to study how adolescents deal with the process of acculturation and how well they adapt. While I have already clarified the distinction between the terms acculturation and assimilation, I note here that the terms acculturation and adaptation have synonymous meaning. In Berry's work, adaptation is the objective of acculturation; rather than change resulting in a shedding of self, change results in a preservation of self while at the same time acquiring a new set of skills and understandings to successfully navigate the society of settlement. Berry et al. (2006) identified two distinct forms of adaption: *psychological adaptation*, which refers to personal well-being, and

sociocultural adaptation which regards an individual's social competence in managing daily life in an intercultural setting.

Berry et al. (2006) also developed a bidimensional profile model to determine four possible ways adolescents live in relation to their home culture and host society. To test the model, Berry's research team adopted a "person approach" (Bergman & El-Khoury, 2003) by which individuals are grouped into categories on the basis of pattern similarity so each category has a particular set of common properties that differentiates it from others. To identify patterns of acculturation, the researchers used quantitative cluster analysis, uncovering four distinct acculturation profiles:

1. *Ethnic profile* represents those adolescents showing clear orientation toward their own ethnic group with high ethnic identity, ethnic language proficiency and usage, and close ethnic peer network. They scored low on assimilation, endorsing a separation attitude and strong support of family relationships and family cultural values. They most strongly embed in their own culture and have little involvement with the larger society.
2. *National profile* represents adolescents with strong orientation toward the host society, high national identity, and less importance placed on ethnic identity. They most likely have peers who are members of the dominant national group, proficiently interact in the national language, and show low support for family obligations. This group related most with the idea of assimilation, unconcerned about retaining their ethnic culture and identity.
3. *Integration profile* represents those with relatively high involvement in both ethnic and national culture, while also holding to strong identities as a member of

both groups. They endorse integration, have high national language proficiency, average ethnic language proficiency, and peer networks in both groups. These youth are comfortable in both ethnic and national contexts.

4. *Diffuse profile* represents those with low proficiency in the national language, low national identity, and limited peer contacts in either group. They endorse contradictory acculturation attitudes and appear uncertain of their place in society. These adolescents may want to be part of the larger society, but lack skills and abilities to connect.

(Bergman & El-Khoury, 2003)

In Berry et al.'s (2006) research, the largest group classified in the integration profile. These youth successfully acculturated by adopting a bicultural mode of living where they remained involved in both their heritage culture and the host culture. The implications for successful acculturation are clear: newcomer youth should be encouraged both to retain their own heritage cultural identity and to establish close ties with the larger national society (Berry et al., 2006).

The second largest group identified with the ethnic profile. These youth sought to acculturate by primarily orienting towards their ethnic group, with only limited involvement with the national host society. The size of this group surprised researchers as they suspected greater appeal among youth to orient to national peers. Berry et al. (2006) noted this finding as unexpected and set forth evidence of the need for cultural maintenance during the process of acculturation.

One finding worthy of mention links perceived discrimination and acculturation profiles. When adolescent newcomers held little perception of discrimination, they most

likely placed within the integration profile group. Those newcomers who had higher perception of discrimination more likely placed within the diffuse profile or ethnic profile group (Berry et al, 2006). A strongest link appears between discrimination and poor adaptation. According to Berry (et al., 2006), when individuals experience discrimination:

They are likely to reject close involvement with the national society and be more oriented to their own group (ethnic) or be confused or ambivalent (diffuse) about their involvement... when not discriminated against, they approach the national society with the same degree of respect that has been accorded them (p. 326).

Berry et al. (2006) illustrated the realities potentially encountered in the acculturation process. Berry's (1994) conceptual framework accounts for these realities by striking an appropriate balance of influences from both the society of origin and the society of settlement in accounting for the lived experience of newcomers.

Segmented Assimilation Theory

This review of theoretical frameworks for acculturation will end with Segmented Assimilation Theory. The segmented assimilation perspective suits the Iowa context well, theoretically based on the recognition that American society is now extremely diverse and segmented. Portes and Zhou (1993) coined the term *segmented assimilation* to describe the three distinctive patterns of immigrant adaptation including:

1. *Upward Mobility*: Immigrant groups rise rapidly to integrate into the host culture middle class. This pattern stems from aspirations to move from one social level to a higher one and begins by adopting the habits, customs, and fashions of the host group in preparation for vertical movement to higher status within that group.

2. *Selective Assimilation* or *Selective Acculturation* might include Gibson's (1988) branch of *Accommodation and Acculturation without Assimilation*. A strong ethnic enclave partners with deliberative preservation of home culture to fuel a pattern of selective acculturation, which may also lead to integration into host culture middle class without compromising ethnic identity. This branch of adjustment is similarly referred to by Rumbaut & Portes (2001) as *Consonant Acculturation*, occurring among middle-class immigrants who, because of their status and resources upon arrival, are often protected to some degree from pressures to assimilate.
3. *Dissonant Acculturation* is a form of *downward assimilation* in which pressures to assimilate quickly cause newcomer students to become estranged from their parents as they lose the ability to communicate in their native language. In addition, changes in the children's lives are not guided or supported by similar changes in their parents' experiences.

Segmented assimilation theory allows for the consideration of different ways in which individuals might approach acculturation and the possible contexts in which newcomers might understand what it means to "become an American" (Portes & Zhou, 1993).

Part II: Influences on Academic Acculturation

This section presents literature responding to the core questions of this study: how do family, culture, schools, and relationships affect academic acculturation?

How Does Family Influence Academic Acculturation?

This collection of literature presents parental expectation and family ideals about education. In addition, the research will include findings related to family separation and

trauma often associated with migration as well as the parent child role reversal that can occur as a result of children acculturating more quickly than their parents.

Portes & Zhou (1993) found for school-aged newcomers entering the United States and for native born children with at least one foreign born parent the transition to American schooling culture can be difficult because learning paradigms are strongly influenced by family understandings of homeland education. Fuligni (1997) studied the impact of family, background, parental attitude, and peer support on immigrant adolescents' drive to succeed academically. In a study of 1,100 teens of Latino, East Asian, Filipino, and European backgrounds, participants reported on their own academic attitudes as well as those of their parents and peers; and then student responses were compared to course grade data. The results indicate first and second generation immigrant students actually received higher grades in English and math than native born peers, with the strongest indicator for achievement emerging as a positive emphasis on education shared by the students, their parents, and their peers. Students who received high levels of education in their home country and whose families come to the United States seeking greater professional opportunity especially evidenced high success (Fuligni, 1997).

Fuligni's findings agree with other research on the Immigrant Paradox (Aretakis, 2011; Portes, 2001; Rumbaut & Portes, 2001; C. Suárez-Orozco et al., 2009), an emerging pattern in which early generation newcomers exhibit more positive academic outcomes than later generation assimilated peers who experience diminishing developmental outcomes and educational achievement (Coll, 2011). Fuligni (1997) found newcomer immigrant students did much better in math and English than their third generation counterparts (Fuligni, 1997), and the achievement gap between first and third generation immigrants consistent with the

literature, adding evidence that first generation immigrants expended substantially more time and effort on academic endeavors than third generation peers.

Aretakis (2011) employed a mixed methods approach to ascertain whether the phenomenon of immigrant paradox could be explained by the processes of academic acculturation, ethnic identity, family obligation, cultural values, or the belief in the American Dream. The qualitative portion of the research presented family immigration and education stories, and the quantitative research included self-report survey data from 223 Latino 9th graders and 135 Dominican 9th graders. Evidence of the immigrant paradox emerged in both Latino and Dominican samples. Family obligation had a significant positive effect on academic attitudes, and cultural values and belief in the American Dream had moderate impact on academic attitudes. Aretakis (2011) points to the importance of family and cultural values in motivating newcomer children to succeed academically. The qualitative data showed students who reported a family incentive of moving to the U.S. to improve the lives of the next generation as more likely to believe in the American Dream. Through quantitative analysis using hierarchical regression, a strong correlation emerged between family stories of positive educational experiences and the students' value of education and family stories of negative educational experiences and negative values of education (Aretakis, 2011).

Fuligni (2001) studied family obligation and adolescent academic motivation by conducting a longitudinal study of the normative development of approximately 1,000 adolescents from immigrant and native-born Asian and Latin American backgrounds. Fuligni (2001) found immigrant youth tend to internalize family traditions of support and respect and commit to these tenets as life-long obligations. Fuligni looked at the degree to which these tenets fuel academic success and found a sense of obligation to family is associated with

greater belief in the importance and usefulness of education, and higher achievement.

Though some could argue obligation to family is not necessarily an intrinsic motivator, rather stems from the belief they must obey parental authority and respect parental wishes, Fuligni (2001) cautions any motivation not intrinsic will have limited persistence. Fuligni's findings were also unclear as to whether youths endorse the importance of family respect because they truly hold the cultural value themselves or because they fear the consequences of not fulfilling cultural duty.

Family separation and trauma. Recognizing the trauma faced by newcomers, Suárez-Orozco, & Todorova (2003) conducted a case study illustrating the interconnected social influences on the social development of immigrant youth, finding the stress of migration, separation, changing relation networks, segregation, and poverty as key factors impacting newcomer identity formation. Suárez-Orozco, and Todorova (2003) address the impact of lost connections and family transitions when immigration strips youth of significant relationships with family and community: "They lose the social roles that provided them with culturally scripted notions of how they fit into the world. Without a sense of competence, control, and belonging, many immigrants feel marginalized" (p. 20).

Suárez-Orozco, and Todorova's (2003) presentation of challenges faced by immigrants experiencing changes in context, roles, and disrupted relationships suggests significant social complications fueling a deep sense of loss. This mirrors Thapa, Van Ommeren, Sharma, De Jong, and Hauff's (2003) finding that due to traumatic histories, some refugee populations suffer disproportionately from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), a condition affecting 8% of Americans overall but up to 43% of certain refugee populations.

Data derived from the Longitudinal Immigrant Student Adaption (LISA) study at Harvard revealed 85% of immigrant youth experienced separation from one or both parents for periods of six months to ten years (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2002). Not surprisingly the study found children who had been separated from their parents had higher reports of depression, adversely impacting motivation toward immersion in the new society (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2002).

In addition to physical absence, obligation and necessity of working several jobs makes low-earning immigrant parents less available to their children than prior to migration. In fact, “[t]his physical absence compounds the psychological unavailability that often accompanies parental anxiety and depression secondary to migration” (Suárez-Orozco, & Todorova, 2003, p. 21). Under these circumstances, attachments to those outside the immediate family become more compelling as youth negotiate changing circumstances and rely on others who might provide information about new cultural norms and practices and tools vital to success in school (Suárez-Orozco, & Todorova, 2003).

Parent child role reversal. In the acculturation process, immigrant and refugee parents’ self-assurance and authority may also be undermined as children typically come into closer contact with American culture through school, which sometimes creates tensions (Suárez-Orozco, & Todorova, 2003). An example of these tensions might include disciplinary practices accepted in their country of origin but in conflict with American norms. Other tensions might stem from positional shifts when children master English language more rapidly and so take on new roles as translators and advocates for their families (Suárez-Orozco, & Todorova, 2003).

Szapocznik's and Kurtines's (1993) acculturation theory focuses on the widening gap between immigrant parents and their children that leads to estrangement in the family.

Szapocznik and Kurtine (1993) points to the problems of acculturation and the struggles that occur as children become acculturated to a new host society and parents are left behind, often resulting in parents attempting to limit their children's acculturation process. This unsettling transition and parental resistance can often result in behavioral problems, emotional problems, substance abuse problems, and issues in school, particularly for newcomers in adolescent transition (Szapocznik & Kurtines, 1993).

Huyck and Fields (1981) developed a conceptual framework for research and services needed by newcomer children. Acculturation to American society contributes significantly to role reversal within refugee and immigrant families according to Huyck and Fields:

The housewife-mother became the culture-carrier of old world traditions; the father engaged largely in blue-collar work with other immigrants, thus limiting his opportunity to learn English; while children in learning English and in becoming more exposed to American history and culture, came to serve as cultural intermediaries in the family's drive for upward mobility (p. 246).

In this way, children often take on leadership positions in their families long before they would have in the natural course of their cultural paradigm (Huyck & Fields, 1981). In addition, Huyck and Fields observe refugee children are frequently victims of traumatized withdrawal as a result of exposure to violence and prolonged threat. This results in pronounced risk factors for children ages 6-11 experiencing transition crises, particularly boys due to less facility to articulate problems and fears (Huyck & Fields, 1981). As children

emerge from traumatic histories into new settings, those experiences influence cultural affinities and identity.

Having addressed the literature related to family, strong support emerges for including the research question: how does family influence academic acculturation? While similar findings to those presented here were anticipated, the unique manifestation of the family influence had not yet been studied in the Iowa schools context.

How Does Culture Influence Academic Acculturation?

One way in which culture influences academic acculturation manifests in the cultural identity newcomers embrace. In this regard, two significant themes emerge in the literature: bicultural identity and sociocultural identity.

Bicultural identity. Identity formation plays a key role in enabling newcomers to develop positive efficacy toward acculturation (Rumbaut & Portes, 2001; Stepick et al., 2001; Suárez-Orozco & Todorova, 2003b; Suárez-Orozco, Todorova, & Louie, 2002; Suárez-Orozco, 1989). All these researchers found a variety of adaptations and identities to be possible, dependent on context.

Global research on newcomer identity (Suárez-Orozco, 2004; Suárez-Orozco, Rhodes, & Milburn, 2009; Suárez-Orozco & Todorova, 2003b) found Mexican immigrant youth who formed transcultural/bicultural identities adhering to aspects of both homeland culture and new host culture associated with better development outcomes, as illustrated in Berry et al. (2006). Suárez-Orozco (2004) explored the way in which immigrant adolescents navigate their lives at the intersection of two cultures: their homeland heritage group and the new host society and how well these youth adapt to their intercultural experience. The research with Mexican participants found the integration approach optimal for adolescent

acculturation because it allows for the development of a new transcultural/bicultural identity wherein youth “are not required to choose between cultures but rather they can incorporate traits of both cultures while fusing additive elements” (Suárez-Orozco, 2004, p. 192).

According to Suárez-Orozco, (1995), immigrant youth and children of immigrants develop a “dual frame of reference,” allowing some measure of comparison between struggles in America and possibly even greater struggles in their home country. Newcomers may use this dual frame of reference to persevere. However, children and youth are less able to measure their current circumstances against past and are left to adopt the ideals of the current culture, which may fall short of their parents’ original aspirations (Suárez-Orozco, 1995). Children of immigrants often become the repository of their parents’ expectations, which can be motivating (Fuligni, 2001) or paralyzing if self-identity is wavering, particularly if newcomers face ethnic conflicts or marginalization (Suárez-Orozco, 1995).

Sociocultural identity. Students able to find identification within an ethnic enclave may find that while this further segregates them, it can also provide social support and access to resources that buffer discrimination faced elsewhere (Garcia Coll & Marks, 2009). In a three-year longitudinal study, Garcia Coll and Marks (2009) examined the cultural, psychological, and academic development of U.S. middle school students from three immigrant groups: Cambodian, Dominican, and Portuguese. Garcia Coll and Marks (2009) employed a mixed methods approach using teacher, parent, and student ethnographic interview data and student achievement data to identify the role identification within ethnic enclave played in academic success or failure. The findings for each population varied. Garcia Coll and Marks (2009) focused on “ethnolinguistic” identity and association with enclave groups that speak the native dialect. In both the Dominican and Portuguese

participant groups, ethnolinguistic identity was found as a more significant factor in academic success than poverty and family composition (Garcia Coll & Marks, 2009). However, the Cambodian community, who came as refugees to designated federal resettlement site concentrated in the poorest section of the city in Providence, Rhode Island, did not have the benefit of earlier migration waves to establish a cultural enclave or ethnic based institutions to help with resources. As a result, ethnolinguistic identity served to isolate them further and hinder student success (Garcia Coll & Marks, 2009). In contrast, both the Dominican and Portuguese communities had vibrant ethnic communities within the new settlement, with strong family and resource networks that grew into transnational communities retaining ties to their home countries. While the enclave helped with transition and disposition, other factors influenced academic success. Dominican students who played with non-Dominican peers showed better academic attitudes, higher acculturation, and greater academic success (Garcia Coll & Marks, 2009). Garcia Coll and Marks (2009) found the fairer skinned Portuguese immigrants with features similar to the majority population, experienced accelerated acculturation but no significant growth in academic achievement.

Academic culture. According to Ogbu (1992), community forces serve to differentiate minority groups in ways that create options allowing for choices of action resulting in individual differences in educational acculturation and success. These complex forces affect social adjustment, and academic performance of newcomer students are not limited to “the wider society, the school, and the classroom; they also include those from the minority communities themselves. These community forces are different for different minorities and they interact differently with the societal and school factors, producing different educational results” (Ogbu, 1992, p. 288). Even though newcomers face similar

barriers in society and school, Ogbu (1992) suggests some newcomer groups are more successful in academic acculturation due to four factors:

1. Cultural models: A people's understanding of the world in turn guides their interpretations of their world, U.S. society, and schooling, and their own actions within those contexts.
2. Cultural language frames of reference are either oppositional or non-oppositional. *Non-oppositional* reference frames acknowledge that U.S. language and cultural practice may differ from the homeland, and differences encountered in the workplace or school are viewed as barriers to overcome in order to achieve success. *Oppositional* reference frames develop when newcomers experience subordination for their differences in language and cultural practices, leading to oppression. Newcomers with oppositional reference frames do not view language and culture challenges as barriers to overcome, but rather as markers of identity to be maintained.
3. Degree of trust or acquiescence indicates the willingness of newcomers to engage in practices modeled by Americans in the cultural systems and societal institutions controlled by the dominant group.
4. Educational strategies encompass the attitudes, plans, and actions newcomers employ or avoid in their pursuit of American education. The newcomer's cultural models, cultural and language reference frames, and degree of trust or acquiescence influence educational strategies.

Each factor represents a dispositional force impacting the degree to which community resources are experienced. These four factors come into play when newcomers require

community resources. According to Ogbu (1992), these dispositions may influence relationships with community forces, the dispensation of resources, and the degree to which newcomer students perceive and respond to schooling. Newcomer responses to schooling and school responses to newcomers are addressed in the next section.

How Do Schools Influence Academic Acculturation?

As previously mentioned, much of the existing literature on acculturation focuses on newcomer students at the college level. This section begins with a look at the influence of postsecondary schools in the academic acculturation process among older students in two international studies. Due to limited examples of research addressing influence of school factors, international postsecondary examples are included. This section concludes with a U.S. study of high school students, which stands as the only sample of its kind found in the current literature.

Shaw, Moore, and Gandhidasan (2007) conducted a case study featuring a graduate level course designed to foster academic integrity and scholastic skills among foreign students introduced to a new academic culture. Widespread occurrence of plagiarism and cheating attributed to lack of skills, and adopting a punitive solution to reduce the problem was ineffective. The case study featured South Asian students transitioning to an Australian graduate institution. Shaw, Moore, and Gandhidasan (2007) found a course directed at interventions to remediate gaps in scholastic skills was more effective in helping students commit to academic integrity than prior solutions. Shaw et al. (2007) emphasized the importance of formative assessment for teaching students how to become accustomed to their new educational culture, so students who gained understanding of the components of academic writing while at the same time learned about the societal importance of academic

integrity without being penalized through recorded grades were more inclined to act with academic integrity.

In another study, Cheng and Fox (2008) examined the academic acculturation of second language (L2) students at three Canadian universities and found newcomers experiencing the highest levels of academic success typically had high social engagement, were strategic in their acquisition of English language, and had intentional systematic approaches to studying. Cheng and Fox (2008) explored factors contributing to or impeding successful academic acculturation. Using a grounded theory approach, they conducted semi-structured interviews with 55 volunteer L2 students. Raw interview responses were analyzed using open coding, resulting in the identification of recurring responses across the groups of participants and three overall themes emerged:

1. Socio-cognitive approaches to learning: students indicated ways in which their learning and coping strategies extended beyond course material to include learning both academic and social English for use outside the classroom. They reported the gap between their self-perceived language proficiency and the actual ability to participate in group-based learning. L2 students found group exchanges helpful for academic learning and also intimidating when L1³ speakers dominate groups.
2. Student academic characteristics: L2 students reported specific strategies for achieving high grades, such as avoiding reading and using the professors' notes and slides, which contained concise examples and short sentences. Others intentionally selected courses in engineering and math where they already had

³ First language.

strong foundational skills so language proficiency might be less of a concern.

Many participants admitted to avoiding classes involving discussion or essay writing.

3. EAP (English for Academic Purposes) characteristics: students' level of English proficiency strongly related to their attitude toward learning a new language. The majority focused more on passing proficiency tests that would allow access to mainstream disciplinary courses than on actual English language acquisition. A dominant belief emerged that time spent in ESL classes focused on discussion wasted time and that more importance was placed on enrolling in courses within the chosen major. Participants who had already completed several years of the university program indicated while they were angered by initial placement in ESL classes, they now see the benefit of those first couple years learning language and have advanced in their major beyond many of their peers who initially passed the English proficiency tests but struggled because of limited language skills.

(Cheng & Fox, 2008)

According to the researchers, academic acculturation does not occur as a result of language or disciplinary learning alone, but rather as an interplay between academic and non-academic experiences (Cheng & Fox, 2008). Of particular interest, the researchers noted mismatched agendas and the level of dissatisfaction and frustration students expressed when their own self-defined expectations and needs did not align with the programming and services offered by the university. This finding pointed to the importance of understanding the non-academic needs of newcomer students and addressing those needs as a priority in conjunction with appropriate academic programming (Cheng & Fox, 2008).

Concerns about the high dropout rate among Mexican-American high school students led Lopez, Ehly, and Garcia-Vasquez (2002) to examine variables affecting academic success, specifically looking at two factors associated with academic achievement: acculturation and social support. The sample consisted of 60 ninth-grade students of Mexican descent in a southwestern school district. While not universally accepted as a stable indicator of achievement, Lopez et al. (2002) used GPA as the measure of success. The study aimed at identifying the relations among degree and type of acculturation as measured by Acculturation Rating Scale for Mexican Americans–II (Cuellar, Arnold, & Maldonado, 1995; Lopez et al., 2002) and the perceived social support measured by the Social Support Scale for Children (Harter, 1985; Lopez et al., 2002). Results showed students identifying as bicultural tended to have higher academic achievement, and the key factors fueling positive achievement came from four support sources: parents, teachers, classmates and close friends.

Lopez et al. (2002) findings are consistent with the literature showing secondary students seek support within and outside the family as a means to acculturation. Lopez et al. (2002) further speculated the correlation between achievement and teacher support is indicative of the academic environment and also noted, from a psychosocial perspective, teachers often function as buffers to stresses and pressures in the school environment. From the perspective of Berry's model of acculturation, the Lopez et al. (2002) research affirms the existence of dual forces influencing acculturation as newcomers look to both their society of origin and their society of settlement for support in the acculturation process. The literature sustains students will utilize adult support within the school to navigate the stressors and pressures of acculturation stress including peer pressure, academic stress, home stress, and adolescent concerns.

The Lopez et al. (2002) study found service providers, staff, faculty, and administrators in schools provide important psychosocial supports affect academic success of newcomers. In addition, Lopez et al. points to the need for further research looking at acculturation and social supports offered by school employees specifically comparing successful students with those not successful. Lopez et al. (2002) recommend the need to understand how these social supports serve to help or hinder student outcomes. Social supports prove essential in the acculturation process; therefore, the next section will consider literature pertaining to relationships.

How Do Relationships Influence Academic Acculturation?

Relationships are essential to the acculturation process because without community bonding anchors to define norms, newcomers must rely on their own inner resources (Côté, 2006). This section presents literature addressing the influence relationships have on academic engagement, followed by a look at the influences of relationships of acceptance and relationships of rejection.

Relationship influences the phenomenon of immigrant paradox, introduced earlier in this chapter. According to research (Portes, 2001; Rumbaut & Portes, 2001), newcomer immigrant children tend to be highly motivated upon arrival in American schools; but, over time, a shift occurs so that length of residency in the U.S. appears to associate with declines in academic achievement and aspirations as well as in physical and social health (Fuligni, 1997, 2001; Portes, 2001; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2009). Suárez-Orozco et al. (2009) noted the immigrant paradox was not universal, and some resilient immigrant students are more likely to succeed than others. Female newcomer students who have greater proficiency in English, literacy in a native language, and high self-efficacy appear to have better academic outcomes

for immigrant students (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2009). In addition, compelling evidence suggests close and confiding relationships in the school environment increase academic engagement (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2009).

Suárez-Orozco, Rhodes, and Milburn (2009) conducted a mixed methods study examining the role of school-based relationships in engagement and achievement in a population of 407 newcomer immigrant students from Central America, China, the Dominican Republic, Haiti, and Mexico over the course of five years. By year five of the study, the majority of students were upper elementary and middle school students between the ages of 9 and 14. The purpose of the study was to examine how relationships within the school building mediate newcomer challenges. Quantitative analysis revealed factors such as country of origin, gender, maternal education, English language proficiency, and school-based relationships influence student engagement and performance, with the strongest factor being school-based relationships.

Relationships of acceptance. Relationships both inside and outside school influence acculturation and different academic outcomes. Relational findings in Suárez-Orozco et al. (2009) pointed to the importance of feeling safe at school; immigrant youth who experience their school as threatening and violent may be particularly vulnerable to the development of academic problems. Discussion emphasized the importance of both tangible and emotional school-based supports. As students place confidence in school leaders to ensure their safety, supportive teacher relationships “appear to attenuate the effects of school violence and enhance feelings of belonging in the school setting, which in turn have implications for academic adjustment” (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2009, p. 741). Nurturing, supportive relationships are of particular importance for newcomers adjusting to a new language,

culture, and educational context (Berry, 1997; Lopez et al., 2002). Therefore, “efforts to understand and bolster immigrant students’ relational, cognitive, and behavioral engagement are likely to yield academic payoffs” (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2009, p. 741).

Relationships of rejection. Schwartz et al. (2007) examined acculturative stress and self-esteem as key factors in successful acculturation in a study included 347 Hispanic adolescents in a new immigrant receiving community in the Midwest. The study found self-esteem a significant mediating factor in academic acculturation and pro-social behaviors positively affected acculturation. The study examined the extent to which acculturation and ethnic identity relate to academic performance. While the Hispanic participants represented many cultures including Puerto Rico, Honduras, Chile, Cuba, and other countries in Central and South America, the majority reported closer orientation toward U.S. culture than their own Hispanic cultures. Schwartz et al. (2007) found orientation toward U.S. culture decreases the likelihood of discrimination and other stressors related to acculturation, and student self-esteem directly linked to pro-social efforts with peers and academic success.

Gibson (1998) explored the complexities of the acculturation process through past research on West Indian, South Asian, and Mexican students attending U.S. schools, looking specifically at the role of acculturation in shaping school patterns of school performance. Gibson (1998) defines acculturation as “the process of culture change and adaptation that occurs when individuals with different cultures come into contact. The end result need not be the rejection of old traits, or their replacement” (p. 617). Gibson challenged the common view of acculturation as the process of shedding foreign ways in order to fit in socially, necessary because learning comes from peers as well as teachers. Gibson’s research across three studies posed three questions: (a) Should schools encourage newcomers to take up

American ways as rapidly as possible? (b) What is the proper role for schools in the acculturation process? (c) Is acculturation the issue in newcomer academic success?

In a study of West Indian newcomers, Gibson (1998) found cultural compatibility and incompatibility frameworks, the dominant paradigm in educational anthropology at the time, were “insufficient for explaining the full range of variability in how adolescents attending public schools respond to their education environment” (p. 620). Among the West Indian students, gender, age, and immigrant status played a greater role than salient cultural background, race, or class in determining educational outcomes.

Gibson’s (1998) research with Punjabi students revealed the experience of racial hostility from peers:

They were told directly by white classmates and indirectly by their teachers that they stank. They were accused of being illegals. And they were verbally and physically abused by white students, who refused to sit by them in class or on school busses, threw food at them when they walked through the central quad, crowded in front of them in lines, told them to go back to India, even spat at them, stuck them with hairpins, and worse! (pp. 621-622).

While only a handful of youths actively participated in this harassment, classmates typically condoned the behavior, and teachers and administrators encouraged Punjabi students to be understanding of their white schoolmate’s ignorance (Gibson, 1998). Gibson’s findings support evidence of blatant discrimination and prejudice found in the literature (Fisher et al., 2000; Stephan & Stephan, 2000), directing my decision to include focus group prompts in this study focusing on experiences with prejudice and discrimination.

Gibson's (1998) study of Punjabi participants, revealed a puzzling contradiction: parents expressed concern over their children's experience as targets of prejudice, while at the same time insisting that enrollment in American public schools best suited their children. Parents believed school crucial for their children to become competitive in American society and those social and academic skills necessary for success outweighed any mistreatment (Gibson, 1998). It might seem rejection of Indian ways would help alleviate the discrimination, but Punjabi parents insisted students be vigilant in not deviating from Punjabi ways. This strategy reflects the branch assimilation addressed earlier in discussions of segmented assimilation theory and similarly noted in studies conducted by Portes and Zhou (1993) and Rumbaut & Portes (2001): accommodation and acculturation without assimilation. Gibson (1998) found that as a result of adopting this strategy, students became skillful in the dominant cultural but also strongly committed to their Punjabi identity.

Gibson's third study involved a group of 113 Mexican students using the transcripts from each year they attended school as data. Of the original sample, only 54 graduated, with two thirds of graduates as girls. The study found track assignments upon entering high school significantly correlated with graduation. Among those placed in remedial track classes upon entering high school, only 39% graduated as opposed to 82% of students who remained in regular grade level or accelerated courses. Gibson's study with Mexican students found although most Mexican students and their parents viewed acculturation as additive, they encountered a school climate that devalued Mexican culture (Gibson, 1998). Despite the absence of a no English-only policy in the district:

Most teachers insisted on English only in their classrooms and half disapproved of students speaking Spanish at school even when chatting with friends. Many also

questioned the wisdom of Mexican students studying Spanish in high school, believing this would detract from time spent on English. Most believed furthermore that the Mexican parents were wrong to insist that their children speak to them in Spanish, believing that they should embrace English as the language of the home. (Gibson, 1998, p. 625)

Gibson (1998) noted teacher's negative attitudes about the issue of Spanish language directly impacted how students felt about school; in some cases, teacher influence affected how they came to value their own identity and culture. While all students in the study were adversely affected by negative school climate, students most negatively affected were those tracked in remedial courses in ninth grade (Gibson, 1998).

In all three of Gibson's studies, immigrant students and their families were targets of prejudice and discrimination. Gibson's (1998) work found that newcomers placed for a brief time in sheltered ESL programs did better than peers with higher English proficiency who entered mainstream courses immediately. Overall, Gibson (1998) found acculturation does indeed play a prominent role in student academic success, and school policies and practices significantly dictate the differing modes of acculturation. Gibson concluded students most at risk are those who acculturate at a faster pace than their parents, causing diminished ability to communicate in their native language and separation from their ethnic community. Gibson's findings aligned with Ogbu (1974) who observed "subordinate and immigrant minorities appear to differ in the way they perceive American society and in how they respond to the education system" (p. 2).

This review of literature concludes with a noted gap. Due to the limited literature pertaining to the U.S. secondary context, a review of international and postsecondary studies

proved necessary. In addition, no found research addressed influences from both the society of origin and the society of settlement in the same study. Finally, Midwest representation limited to only one study, with no discoverable examples of the Iowa context. These omissions from the existing research on academic acculturation support the need for further study. My research addressing the lived experiences of teenage newcomers in Iowa schools is timely. While no studies of academic acculturation have been conducted in Iowa, a small amount of anthropological work provides explanation of Iowa's rapid growth and diversity. A brief summary of that literature is presented in the next section to help the reader better understand the Iowa context.

Part III: Iowa Newcomers

As a result of increasing newcomer populations, Iowa has become the new gateway state (Grey, 2013). According to Grey (2013), Iowa is a land of *micro-populations* where significant growth of smaller ethnically and linguistically distinct groups has resulted in *microplurality*, an outcome of diversity where racial categories become less relevant than ethnic populations and where communities become defined by culture, language, religion, and immigration status. Additionally, several Iowa communities are experiencing what Grey (2013) terms *Anglo-inversion*—an occurrence when all the minorities together outnumber the former white majority, resulting in a minority-majority. According to Grey (2013) in Anglo-inverted communities, newcomers may no longer identify one clearly dominant culture. With this powerful shift in demographic, some Iowa school districts have become the epicenter of newcomer acculturation.

New Iowans may arrive either as refugees or voluntary immigrants. Refugee newcomers often make connections through a sponsor organization supporting resettlement

such as the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) or Catholic Charities (Bureau of Refugee Services, 2014) or through voluntary immigration avenues. Almost 19 million refugees exist world-wide, with about 10.4 million under the banner of UNHCR protection in 2013—half are children under the age of 18 (UNHCR, 2014). Approximately 1% of refugees resettle in developed countries (Stuecker, 2006). In 2013, the United States brought 69,930 refugees to safety, resettling the newcomers into 186 communities in 49 States, with a commitment to sheltering 70,000 refugees in 2014 (U.S. Department of State, 2013). In the last decade, Iowa has averaged about 433 new refugee arrivals each year (Bureau of Refugee Services, 2014).

The UNHCR contracts with communities across the nation to guarantee employment, housing, and education for displaced families. Many refugees now living in Iowa have experienced impoverished rural living, the threat of violent ethnic conflict, severe poverty, and political oppression. As a result, many do not have the skills necessary to work in an industrialized country (Stuecker, 2006). Within the state of Iowa, relocation settlement has occurred in concentrated areas, typically in communities with ample employment opportunity for non-skilled laborers in secondary labor markets (Grey, 1997). High-turnover, low-paying, high-injury-risk jobs, rejected by the host population characterize these job markets, making it necessary to recruit laborers from elsewhere.

Iowa is an ideal relocation option for both refugee and immigrant families due to the abundance of job opportunities available in the meat packing industry (Eko, 2011; Grey, 1997). Grey (1997, 2013) provides a compelling explanation for Iowa's newcomer growth, pointing to secondary labor in the meatpacking industry as the main catalyst for demographic change. Over the last decade, the number of students identified with Limited English

Proficiency (LEP) has risen significantly in each of the seven school districts located in Iowa's meatpacking communities: "Total LEP growth in meatpacking towns was 343%, while LEP enrollments in rural schools grew by over 109% over the ten year period...these seven districts accounted for 80.4% of growth in LEP enrolments in all rural districts" (Grey, 1997, p. 187).

The newcomer experience cannot be generalized. However, similar challenges have led to some common characteristics among those identifying as refugees who have come to the United States. These experiences deeply impact the way refugee newcomers understand schools, navigate transitions, and engage with education. For children, the journey to a safe land has often involved instability, loss of family and friends, and violence. According to Mollica et al, (1993), over 50% of refugees have witnessed the murder of a family member or suffered starvation.

Refugee camps around the world vary in size, safety, and resources; however, the lack of educational opportunities stands as one common—more than 80% of children living in refugee camps do not have access to adequate education (United Nations High Commission for Refugees, 2003). While some camps have buildings with desks and chalkboards, some have only makeshift tents to serve as schools, and some have no schools at all. Additionally, low enrollment in refugee camp schools results as families are forced to concern themselves with survival rather than education. In Sudan, only 32% of children in refugee camps attend school (UNHCR, 2003); and even camps with adequate facilities typically fail to achieve the structure and support necessary for academic success due to lack of resources such as textbooks, paper, and pencils, and poor teacher preparation. A recent survey of 10,800 teachers serving 66 refugee camps found the average responsibility ratio as

50 students to one instructor, with 85% of teachers classified as refugees themselves and only 60% of those surveyed having qualifications to teach (UNHCR, 2003). In some areas, like Tanzania, the average student/teacher ratio can be as high as 132 to 1 (UNHCR, 2003).

As refugee students relocate in Iowa communities, their gaps in educational foundations present unique challenges. Due to traumatic histories, some refugee populations suffer disproportionately from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), a condition affecting 8% of Americans overall but up to 43% of certain refugee populations (Thapa, Van Ommeren, Sharma, De Jong, & Hauff, 2003). In addition, refugee families face many challenges that hinder ability to acclimate to the expectations American education.

These challenges further complicate when newcomers with these histories enter school settings that lack understanding of these experiences. As Iowa schools become the epicenters of academic acculturation of both refugee and immigrant newcomers, compelling evidence (Devlin & Grey, 2014; Grey, 1997, 2013) suggests the need for academic acculturation research in Iowa.

Segmented assimilation theory allows for the consideration of different ways in which individuals might approach acculturation and the possible contexts in which newcomers might understand what it means to “become an American” (Portes & Zhou, 1993). This aligns with Grey’s (1997, 2003, 2013) determination of Iowa as a state of microplurality where incoming diverse populations collectively outnumber the previous majority, resulting in what Grey calls a minority majority. Anglo-inversion means some communities may no longer have a dominant culture for target acculturation. In an Anglo-inverted microplurality (Devlin & Grey, 2014), any one population within the array of many different sub-groups may represent the host culture to the newcomer; therefore, a minority

sub-group might become the focused mentor community for newcomer acculturation (Xie & Greenman, 2005). Thus, newcomers may take divergent paths in the acculturation experience.

Contribution to the Literature

Evidence provided by the Federation For American Reform (2013), Grey (1997, 2013), the Immigration Policy Center (2013), and the Iowa Department of Education (2013) anticipates significant growth in minority newcomer populations in the coming years. This study aims to further contribute to the literature by adding qualitative evidence to the story of academic acculturation in Iowa secondary schools from perspective of past students who lived the experience—an important inquiry not yet initiated in Iowa.

My research further expands the literature on acculturation by giving new application to Berry's model of acculturation in regards to the dual influence of society of origin and society of settlement. I accomplish this specifically by investigating the influences of family, culture, relationships, and school, in the Iowa context.

In addition, this study features a phenomenological approach, adding another dimension to qualitative applications in the field of academic acculturation research. By unveiling the *lived experiences* (Van Manen, 1990) of Iowa's teenage newcomers, I hope to discover and present a story not yet told in the literature.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Moustakas (1994) posited that an integrated and inseparable relationship exists between a phenomenon and the person experiencing the phenomenon; therefore, research should focus on the wholeness of experience and a search for the essence of experiences. To better understand the *lived experiences* (Van Manen, 1990) of students, I used a phenomenological approach (Moustakas, 1994; Skuza, 2007; Van Manen, 1990) to answer the central question: What are the academic acculturation experiences of teenage newcomers in Iowa schools? As this primary question was explored, my inquiry also considered four sub-questions:

How does family influence academic acculturation?

How does culture influence academic acculturation?

How do relationships influence academic acculturation?

How do schools influence academic acculturation?

Chapter 3 presents the methodology and theoretical foundations supporting my research, the participants, data collection and analysis, design issues, limitations and delimitations, and researcher positionality.

Qualitative Research Approach

Qualitative research is the study of the empirical viewpoint of the person under study, understanding behavior is influenced by physical, sociocultural, and psychological environment (Krefting, 1991). According to Bogdan and Biklen (2007), “Most qualitative researchers reflect some sort of phenomenological perspective” (p. 24). Phenomenology is the search for the ways in which human experience gives meaning to a phenomenon and

provides an avenue for investigating human experience through the perceptions of research participants (Salmons, 2010). Within the realm of phenomenological investigation, a variety of frameworks exist such as *symbolic interaction* used in sociology, *culture interpretation* including ethnography, *semiotics* used in anthropology and education, and *ethnomethodology* (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Beyond phenomenological approaches, a variety of conceptual frameworks reflect qualitative methods including cultural studies, critical theory, feminism, and post modernism (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Each theoretical framework may dictate a slightly different approach to research project design. However, the cultural studies approach best suits to this phenomenological investigation.

Phenomenology reduces individual experiences with a phenomenon to a description of the universal essence. According to Van Manen (1990), this description provides a “grasp of the very nature of the thing” (p. 177). I have identified an “object of human experience” (Van Manen, 1990, p. 163), acculturation to Iowa schools, and have collected data from persons who have experienced that phenomenon in order to develop a composite description of the essence of the experience for all individuals (Creswell, 2013). The description consists of what participants experienced and how they experienced it (Moustakas, 1994) in a search for understanding.

Qualitative research is characterized by the search for meaning and understanding, with the researcher as the primary instrument of data collection and analysis, using inductive and investigative strategy, resulting in a richly descriptive product (Merriam, 2009). A qualitative approach allows an understanding of the lived experience of acculturation for newcomer students as expressed in their own words. According to Crotty (1998), the

essential elements of the research process include epistemology, theoretical perspective, methodology, and methods.

Epistemology and Philosophical Assumptions

An epistemological approach, constructivism frames how people actively construct knowledge, making meaning of their experiences, which leads to understanding.

Constructivist learning respects the active role the learner takes in the process of meaning making and acknowledges learning is more than the passive transmission of information (Brooks & Brooks, 1993; Duffy & Cunningham, 1996).

From the constructivist perspective, two important principles contribute to constructed understanding: (a) prior knowledge always influences the formation of new knowledge and (b) learning is an active process (Hoover, 1996). Constructive learning involves more than simple transfer of knowledge. Rather, prior knowledge and experience influence new knowledge construction; and if new learning is inconsistent with a student's current understanding, his or her understanding can change to accommodate new experience (Hoover, 1996). Thus, meaning making is interpretive and dependent on both the learner's past experience and current understandings (Jonassen, 1991). In other words, people construct new knowledge and understanding by blending new information with preexisting knowledge (Cooper & D'Inverno, 2004; Woolfolk, 2012). This way of understanding the world has direct application to the process of academic acculturation. Transition to a new learning environment while simultaneously entering a new culture requires newcomer integration of past experience and new information to create meaning. Any time an individual learns how to engage as a participant in a new culture, the core tenets of constructivist theory are required.

Constructivist worldview holds that reality is both actively constructed and socially constructed. Narayan, Rodriguez, Araujo, Shaqlaih, and Moss (2013) present an explanation of ontological and epistemological assumptions important to this study. Relativism, the ontological assumption of constructivism, claims no absolute truth, only truth created by the individual, or particular time and culture, or both (Narayan et al., 2013). This assumption holds accurate as those experiencing acculturation create personalized truths unique to the individual and wholly influenced by historical context and culture climate of both the home society and the host society.

The epistemological assumption of constructivism is transactional subjectivism in which both the object under investigation and the investigator are linked (Narayan et al., 2013). In this way, new knowledge or research findings are co-created as the investigation proceeds (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). I posit this study of academic acculturation includes elements of transactional subjectivism. Through the use of focus groups and narrative survey, participants made meaning by sharing accounts of lived experience in relation to the phenomenon. Meaning was made as participants dialogued with each other in a facilitated discussion and as I analyzed the data to find commonalities and divergence among testimonies to create an overall profile representative of the collective experience. Neither the participants, nor the researcher, could create such meaning independent of the other, emphasizing the transactional subjectivist relationship. The constructivist and transactional subjectivist relationship often drives educational research.

Within educational research, particularly research applied to learning, various types of constructivism emerge; but two hold importance in an investigation of academic acculturation: critical constructivism and cultural constructivism. Critical constructivism

examines the social and cultural environment with the intention of improvement so that learners can be successful (Narayan et al., 2013). According to Narayan et al. (2013), critical constructivism suggests teachers need to work collaboratively to reconstruct an educational culture, acknowledging a joint work not accomplished by one individual alone. As a former secondary teacher, I anticipated findings emphasizing the collaborative nature of school-wide culture formation. I address the extent to which the social and cultural environment align or collide in support of learners in the findings; the very question itself evidences that critical constructivism plays a role in this investigation.

Cultural constructivism considers the wider scope of cultural influences beyond the immediate social environment of the learning situation (Narayan et al., 2013). This view of constructivism respects the cultural foundation of the learner and the important role of origin factors such as family, language, and culture in one's ability to learn. Cultural constructivist theory pertains to this study because, by nature, constructivism applies across cultures since it holds to the notion that all meaning is co-created and dependent on the offerings of both the individual learner and the school environment (Narayan et al., 2013). Focus group discussion prompts included a range of topics from both the home and school environment. The focus group method of data collection (Morgan, 1997) naturally allows for co-construction of meaning with others who have *lived experiences* with the phenomenon of academic acculturation experience.

Phenomenological Methodology

This study follows a phenomenological approach, a philosophical tradition that explores subjective lived experience (Moustakas, 1994). Phenomenology implies an epistemology for social science research in which the question of meaning is central and

interrogates experience as humans live it (Skuzza, 2007). Phenomenological research reveals the essential meaning of a phenomenon—academic acculturation in this study—by distinguishing its features and describing how it is experienced (Skuzza, 2007).

Van Manen (1990) describes phenomenology as a form of human science research oriented towards *lived experiences*, echoing the sentiment of Skuzza (2007) but moving beyond mere description of the phenomenon to interpret findings and mediate the meaning of that lived experience. In this sense, the study takes the approach of hermeneutic phenomenology (Van Manen, 1990) which combines hermeneutic interpretation with phenomenology for research both interpretive and descriptive: one cannot study experience without simultaneously inquiring into its meaning. Moustakas (1994) approaches phenomenology as a transcendental or psychological inquiry focused on the reported experience of the participant rather than interpretations of the researcher. Through focus group discussion and surveying participants who have experienced this phenomenon, the researcher invites the participants themselves to account for their lived experience with academic acculturation. The collected data can be reduced to develop a description of the experience common to those who have lived it, thus synthesizing data into the essence of the experience (Creswell, 2013).

Skuzza (2007) postured that a research methodology based on phenomenological epistemology can humanize the understanding of the acculturation experience by investigating the lived experience of individuals in the process of acculturating. Phenomenology is an epistemological position that informs research methods and methodologies focusing on the lived experience of an individual around a phenomenon (Creswell, 2013). This study of the phenomenon of the academic acculturation experience

follows the phenomenological design approach recommended by Creswell (2013), including defining features gleaned from the work of seminal phenomenological researchers (Moustakas, 1994; Van Manen, 1990). The proposed research (a) emphasizes a phenomenon to be explored, (b) explores the phenomenon with a group of individuals who have experienced the same phenomenon, (c) invites philosophical discussion about basic ideas involved in conducting a phenomenology, (d) engages data collection procedure involving interviewing individuals who have experienced the phenomenon, (e) approaches data analysis following a systematic procedure moving from narrow to broader units of discovered meaning, and (f) offers a concluding description of the essence of living the phenomenological experience (Creswell, 2013).

Acculturation, a common phenomenon in the experience of immigrants and refugees (Berry, 1997), refers to the change individuals undergo as they transition from their society of origin to a new society of settlement. While multiple disciplines have contributed to the understanding of acculturation, few studies have investigated the phenomenon of academic acculturation as a lived human experience. Instead, research has emphasized acculturation as a construct, removed from immersive human experience. According to Skuza (2007), “It can be difficult to put acculturation into perspective because this phenomena does not have static boundaries. Rather it is a pervasive, dynamic, vase, and complex phenomenon that is experienced somewhat differently by each individual” (p. 448).

The current research on acculturation holds a prevailing assumption of assimilation, which limits understanding of how immigrants experience and influence their new environment. Skuza (2007) warned that current research utilizing typical psychological or orthogonal models “limits the ability to view acculturation as a multidirectional and

multidimensional experience that is lived and diminishes the cultural worth found in the society of origin” (p. 449).

Orthogonal models of acculturation may come into play in a study of this kind. Orthogonal acculturation models specify identification with one culture can be independent of identification with another, which adds flexibility and a greater range of outcomes (Skuza, 2007). Orthogonal models respect the individual’s capacity to identify with one or more cultures without assuming a loss in any one culture. According to Skuza (2007), identification is still bound to cultural patterns found in either the society of origin and/or society of settlement, which disregards influences that may stem from other cultural sources. Some participants may have experienced acculturation from a variety of perspectives; thus, solid phenomenological approach best suits this inquiry. The phenomenological method places emphasis upon the lived experience of the individual, allowing a myriad of outcomes.

Phenomenological method differs from investigating acculturation with scientific theory, perspectives, conceptualizations, or any position that prescribes prior meaning. Phenomenological approach paired with openness to understanding human experience provides an opportunity to humanize the phenomenon of academic acculturation. This study openly approaches the phenomenon by considering personal experiences of teenagers who have encountered the phenomenon of academic acculturation.

Participants and Sampling

The focus of this study is specific to understanding the meaning secondary students hold in their views about the phenomenon of acculturation. Therefore *target informers* (Creswell, 2013) must be those in best the position to offer meaning to the study. Participants

for this study included a diverse group of 18 individuals, male and female, representing 10 different nationalities as represented in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1

National Origins of Participants

Country of Origin	Number of Participants
Burma	3
China	1
Cuba	1
El Salvador	1
Kenya	2
Laos	1
Mexico	1
South Sudan	2
Thailand	5
Vietnam	1

For this group of participants, I utilized “convenience sampling” (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Creswell, 2013; Moustakas, 1994, Salmons, 2010). Participants included former students who entered the Iowa school system as refugee or immigrant newcomers during the middle or high school grades, having now exited their secondary program. Student participants all identified as newcomers with either immigrant or refugee histories.

Criteria for participation stipulated only persons having reached the age of 21. High school graduation was not required. While this study sought to learn about the experiences of secondary students, I did not engage participants still in their teenage years. Instead, I took direction from research conducted by Bassett, Beagan, Ristovski-Slijepcevic, and Chapman (2008) who encountered difficulties when encouraging teenagers to have conversation in a structured research interview or focus group. Past research with this age group has emphasized the importance of including participants not limited to the constraints of

adolescent conversational ability (Bagnoli & Clark, 2010; Bassett et al., 2008). Therefore, most desired participants should be able to reflect upon and assess their experience as newcomers from a position of time and distance as recommended by Bassett et al. (2008). For this reason, I intentionally sought adults, several years removed from their newcomer experience, who entered the Iowa school system during their middle or high school years.

By including participants over the age of 21, I removed some complications related to interviewing teenagers in order to solicit useful data (Bassett et al., 2008): inability to reflect, reliability of testimony, and problematic recruitment (Bagnoli & Clark, 2010). The time lapse from initial introduction to Iowa schools to present day also provided data on long-term academic success indicators such as high school graduation and/or enrollment in post-secondary education. More years in Iowa also yielded higher levels of English proficiency among participants, which eliminated the need to utilize an interpreter. All participants in this study had language proficiency skills high enough to self-report English as one of their primary languages. Table 3.2 presents the fifteen languages spoken by participants in this study.

Table 3.2

Languages of Participants

Languages Spoken	Number of Participants	Languages Spoken	Number of Participants
Arabic	1	Mabaan	1
Burmese	5	Mandarin	1
Dinka	1	Nuer	1
English	18	Somali	2
Karenni	8	Spanish	4
Kiswahili	1	Thai	5
Kuy	1	Vietnamese	5
Lao	1		

In order to include a representation of participants from varying national and cultural origins and representative of newcomers from across Iowa, I utilized convenience sampling. I accomplished such convenience sampling (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Creswell, 2013; Moustakas, 1994, Salmons, 2010) through a network of ESL educators, many of whom maintain ongoing relationships with past students. While attending the Iowa Culture and Language Conference, I had the opportunity to collaborate with educators from across the state, sharing information about my study. Teachers then passed information along to potential participants to support convenience sampling (Salmons, 2010). According to Nagle and Williams (2013), convenience sampling provides the best opportunity to involve individuals with characteristics of the overall population who might thoughtfully contribute to helping the research gain insight into the research topic. By conducting focus groups in five different communities, I included participants from various locations and gave representation to those under target analysis, thus sampling a subset of the population (Nagle & Williams, 2013).

Data Collection Procedures

For qualitative inquiry, Creswell (2013) recommends the ideal data collection setting as the natural environment of the informants without introducing a contrived environment such as a lab. For this reason, data collection took place in locations of comfort and familiarity to the participants. I collected data in school classrooms where students had previously studied or in familiar community buildings in the participants' neighborhoods. Each session included a pre-scheduled 70-minute meeting following the structure outlined in Figure 3.1.

Data Collection Event	
10 - 12 minutes	Researcher & project introduction overview of the session
5 minutes	Review of IRB informed consent
10 -15 minutes	Participant completion of survey
30-35 minutes	Participant focus group discussion
5 minutes	Presentation of incentives

Figure 3.1. Academic Acculturation Study: Focus Group Meeting Schedule.

Qualitative research calls for multiple forms of data, which may include documents, art, recordings, interviews, conversations, observations, and rarely relies on just one data source (Creswell, 2013). Data collection tools in this study included both narrative survey (see Appendix C) and focus group discussion (See Appendix D). Figure 3.2 provides a visual guide to the data collection tools.

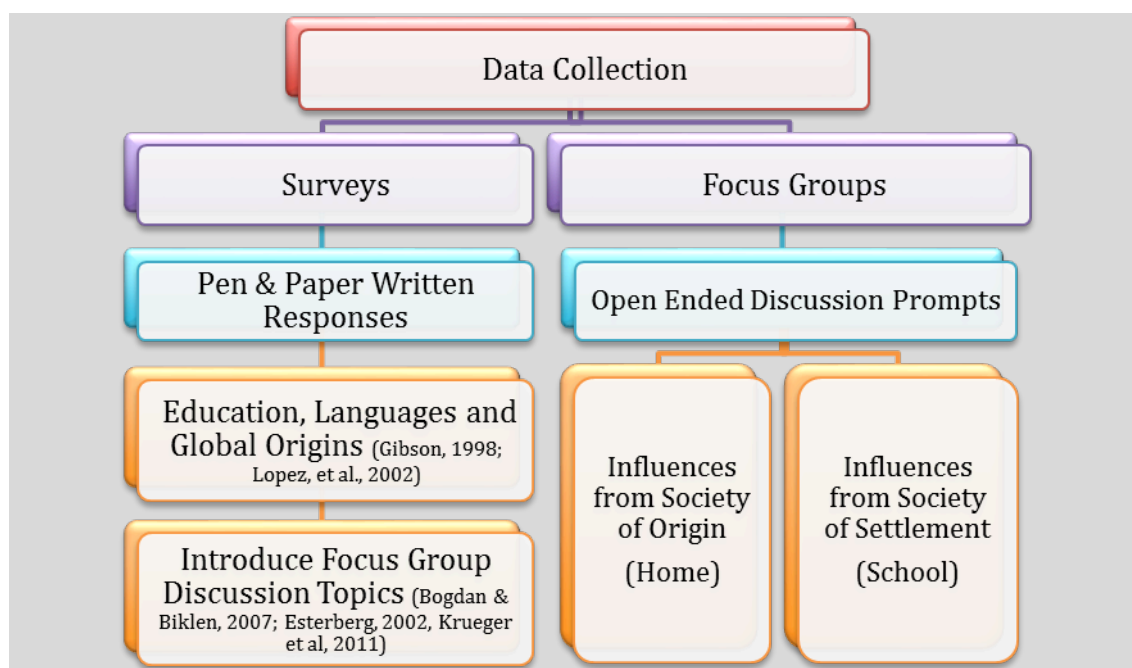


Figure 3.2. Academic Acculturation Study: Data Collection Tools.

Surveys

In anticipation of potential technology issues, I made the survey available in paper and pencil format at all data collection events. Krueger and Casey (2008) note focus groups are often used successfully in conjunction with questionnaires or surveys because the additional mode of information collection improves the quality of the data. To aid in constructing a narrative survey, I reviewed Krueger and Casey's (2008) and Shkedi's (2004) model for narrative inquiry, which utilize narrative surveys in positivistic-quantitative research. When seeking to understand a distinct people group, a researcher must gain insight into the unique expression of cultures through contextual narratives, collectable in a survey format (Shkedi, 2004). Narrative survey follows the narrative-constructivist approach, which includes many narrative methods of data collection and analysis. In this study, participants began the data collection session by completing a ten-question paper and pencil narrative survey. This tool provided data on country of origin, languages spoken, age upon arrival in Iowa, grade level placement, years of education prior to arrival, time span for development of English language skills, high school graduation, and post-secondary studies. The final prompt on the survey invited participants to write a brief narrative on how they came to Iowa.

Beginning data collection with the survey helps to focus participants as well as to provide additional supportive information for personal narratives. Providing a survey ahead of the focus group encounter helps participants establish thoughts and convictions prior to the group exchange (Krueger & Casey, 2008; Krueger et al., 2001). When individuals have had time to think ahead and pre-establish their personal positions, their contributions during the focus group session are more authentic. Sometimes individuals will divulge more information in a survey or questionnaire than they would in the group (Krueger et al., 2001).

Focus Groups

The primary goal of focus groups centers on co-constructing knowledge through appreciative inquiry and ethnographic methods (Krueger, Casey, Donner, Kirsch, & Maack, 2001; Krueger and Casey, 2008). Discussion topics for the focus group directly correlated with the four overarching influences of acculturation central to this study: family, culture, school, and relationships. This approach follows Krueger and Casey (2008) who recommend discussion topics that address the purpose of the study and may be somewhat controversial yet easy to understand. The phrasing and sequencing of questions moved from general to specific topics and included open-ended questions to promote participant engagement and involvement (Krueger et al., 2001). This process maximizes authentic response reflective of participant experience, not guided by the researcher.

Qualitative design recognizes the *researcher* as a key instrument in the qualitative process since he or she is typically directly involved in the data collection and design of data instruments (Creswell, 2013; Luttrell, 2003; Nash & Bradley, 2011). I gave careful consideration to potential issues of inequity (Krueger & Casey, 2008; Seidman, 2013) by assuring the data collection environment was familiar to the participants and the arrangement of chairs and positioning of myself as facilitator mitigated imbalance of perceived power.

Another important strategy of qualitative data collection employs open-ended questions and prompts to evoke personal storytelling of lived experience. Depending on participant engagement, simply providing the discussion prompt such as “discuss teachers” or “discuss relationships” was sometimes sufficient to generate quality focus group dialogue. I also prepared discussion questions to utilize only when prompts alone did not generate sufficient presentation of meaningful data. The scope of topics addressed within discussion

intentionally began with general concepts somewhat distanced from the participant and gradually moved toward more personalized inquiry. During the focus group sessions, I found English proficiency level of student participants sometimes required rephrasing questions for clear understanding. The focus group discussion guide is included in Appendix D.

To maintain consistency across data collection events, I presented the discussion prompts on slides, projected during the discussion. Discussion topics were presented in the same order in each focus group, with a predetermined amount of time recommended between transitions. However, as the data collection events progressed, it became necessary to allow for more time on certain topics as participant enthusiasm for certain subjects emerged. So, while I had a rather organized structure in place for consistency across all data collection events, each experience differed somewhat according to the response of participants, especially in instances of collaborative meaning making where participants bonded over shared experiences or expressed contradicting experiences.

Focus group discussions were digitally recorded using both video camera and a compact digital audio recording device. Both video and audio recordings were then digitally transferred to MP4 files for playback. A professional transcriptionist transcribed the recordings verbatim, leaving the exact language, phrasing, and sentence structure of participants intact, thus honoring the voice, context, and language development of individual participants.

Data Collection Ethics

The researcher relationship with the participants involved three contacts in accordance with Seidman's (2013) model for interviewing. Initial efforts began with an invitation for participation and provided information about this study. This contact occurred

as either a written announcement posted in the ICLC 2014 conference program or an email or telephone contact. In a three step process (Seidman, 2013), the first contact with the researcher presented participants with information about the study and IRB consent. The second contact included a pre-scheduled focus group meeting lasting approximately 70 minutes, following the format presented in Fig 3.1. The third contact provided a member check opportunity for those participants who opted to review the focus group transcripts then offer to clarify, amend, or ask further questions as a follow-up.

To ensure confidentiality, the 18 study participants were not asked to identify their name or school district during the collection of data. During transcription, numbers identified individual voices, and all school and community indicators were removed. The focus group recordings, transcription documents, and all notes pertaining to the focus group are stored on a password secured computer, inside a password secured folder accessible only by the researcher. Likewise, the written survey responses were filled out anonymously, with no prompt requiring participant identification. Hard copies of all documents are stored in a locked file cabinet in the researcher's office. All digital data is secured on a private computer with a password-protected log in, inside a password protected folder and will remain so for a period of five years after the final iteration of data analysis. Participants received full explanations of these precautions in the IRB document included in Appendix A. In addition, all video recording was wiped from the camera memory once the video transferred to MP4 files. Audio and video data was stored on a password secure laptop accessible only by the researcher and erased from the computer hard drive once the transcription was drafted and member check completed.

Data Analysis Procedures

The analytical stage of focus group methodology coalesced the focus group discussion into a manageable form for report development (Nagle & Williams, 2013). My analysis began immediately after focus group closure and included comprehensive note-taking and summarization of the discussion with the participants during the focus group session in order to facilitate more efficient analysis. As my intent respects the recommended approaches for qualitative data analysis, I offer those recommendations first and then follow with a description of my actual experience with data coding.

Qualitative Approaches to Data Coding

Creswell (2003, pp. 190-192) recommends six clear steps for data analysis which inform the approach to data analysis: 1) organize and prepare the data, 2) read through all the data to get a general understanding of the material, 3) begin detailed coding of the data--Creswell defines coding as grouping the data into “chunks” according to theme, 4) use the coding process to generate a descriptions, 5) explain how the description and themes will be represented in the qualitative narrative, and 6) interpret.

In a similar manner, Giorgi (1997) advocates five concrete steps to making meaning of data in the human scientific phenomenological method. Giorgi’s (1997, p. 8-10) steps align with Creswell’s recommendations but are more clearly defined for the phenomenological approach.

Step 1: Collection of verbal data. In accordance with phenomenological method, I collected data in the form of straightforward descriptions as presented by participants in the focus group discussions and surveys. I provided open-ended questions so participants could

express extensive viewpoints for the purpose of obtaining a detailed description of the participants' experience with the phenomenon (Giorgi, 1997).

Step 2: Reading the data. Since the phenomenological approach is holistic, I began with a global reading of all data before initiating analysis. Global sense of meaning is needed to understand relationships between parts, but Giorgi (1997) cautions that no dissection of parts should occur in the first reading.

Step 3: Breaking the data into parts. Since phenomenology is interested meanings, division into chunks is based on meaning discrimination. I conducted a repeated reading of the entire description looking for "meaning units" (Giorgi, 1997, p. 8).

Step 4: Organization and expression of the data from a disciplinary perspective. Once I established a collection of units, I considered the disciplinary value of each unit (Giorgi, 1997). In this study, meaning units are articulated within the realm of sociocultural and educational paradigms. In qualitative inquiry, the *participants* provide data as meaning; therefore, my focus was on learning the meaning participants hold about the phenomenon (Creswell, 2013; Giorgi, 1997).

Step 5: Synthesis or summary of the data for purposes of communication in the scholarly community. In this step, the project becomes scholarly work, in which "the statements of the subjects are transformed by the researcher to be in accord with the researcher's disciplinary intuition, which becomes stabilized after the process of imaginative variation" (Giorgi, 1997, p. 9). I have the responsibility of equally honoring the authenticity of participant lived experience as articulated and presenting that testimony within the context of disciplinary meaning and implications. Creswell's (2013) conceptions of logic are helpful in this process. Creswell recommends qualitative researchers build patterns and themes with

a bottom-up approach through an inductive-deductive logic process using complex reasoning skills, working back and forth between themes and data sources until a comprehensive set of themes emerge tied to disciplinary foci. Employing Giorgi's (1997) recommendations for data coding and understanding data reduction as the key to the analytical stage, I used graphic organizers as recommended by Nagle and Williams (2013) to divide content into manageable concepts for report development.

Qualitative Axial and Open Data Coding

While the steps for data analysis recommended by Creswell (2003) and Giorgi (1997) are clear and clean, the actual process is not. I followed the recommended steps, while remaining open to the iterative process, which resulted in 6 phases of analysis.

Data Coding Phase 1: Data Collection. The first phase of my process included collection of verbal and written data.

Data Coding Phase 2: Transcription. Next transcription was accomplished so that verbatim transcripts of all verbal and written data were produced using the exact phrasing of the participants, leaving intact misspoken phrases, pronunciations, and grammatical structure of the newcomer voices.

Data Coding Phase 3: Reading. As reading data commenced, I first read through all the focus group data to gain a general understanding of the material (Creswell, 2003) and jotted notes pertaining to topics that emerged. This provided a global sense of meaning Giorgi (1997) recommends as important before dissecting the data into parts. On the second read of focus group transcriptions, I began to notice stories with similar topical threads and created a graphic organizer to categorize themes as they emerged. I often repeated reading and re-reading of some sections.

Data Coding Phase 4: Here I organized the topics and subtopics into thematic *meaning units* (Giorgi, 1997), or what Creswell (2003) calls *chunks*, and assigning a color code to each. As meaning units emerged, I identified 9 major codes and 33 secondary codes, which I identify in the findings as 9 major themes and 33 subthemes. For a labeling, I used color highlighting tools in Microsoft Word that include palettes of color tones with varying values of intensity. I assigned a color group for each thematic unit such as blue for family influences, green for school influences, pink for relationship influences. Varying intensities of the color shade represented subtopics within that theme, such as light blue for family separation, medium blue for family support, dark blue for family lack of support, and navy blue for family control. A full color key for coding system I developed during data analysis is included as Appendix E.

Data Coding Phase 5: The next step in my analysis involved coding the transcripts by highlighting transcriptional text with the corresponding color bands assigned to each theme.

Figure 3.3 provides a visual snapshot of color coded transcription.

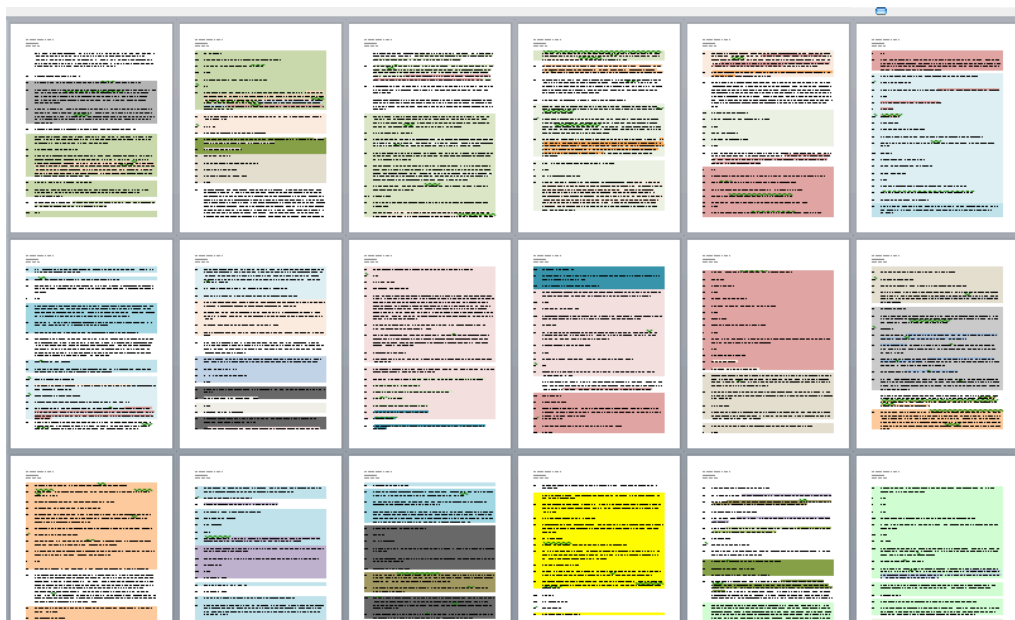


Figure 3.3. Data Color Coded Transcript Example.

This was not a linear process, as many stories represented more than one theme resulting in the need for double coding and laying color codes. Collectively, this manner of coding reveals the intricate relationships among influences in the acculturation experience. Figure 3.4 provides a visual of example of multiple theme color codes.

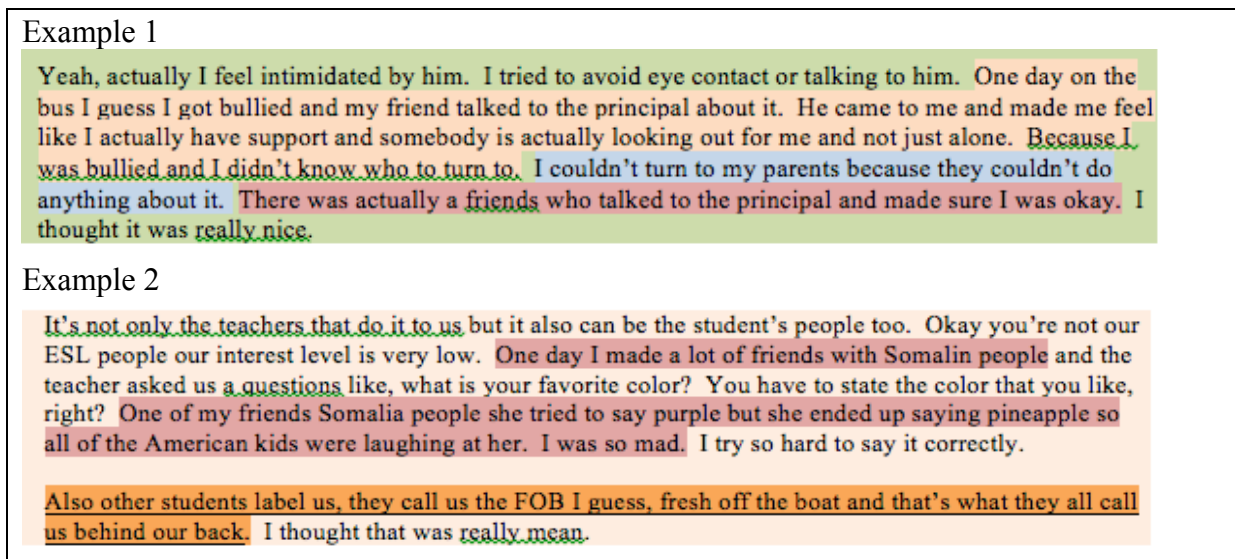


Figure 3.4. Multiple Theme Data Color Coding Example A.

In Example 1, the green code represents experience with a school administrator, but the peach colored code tags an example of bullying. Layered together, the coding indicates a relationship between these factors, reported in chapter four and discussed in chapter five. The first example also includes a band of blue indicating the theme of family support and pink for peer relationships.

In Example 2, shades of peach indicate bullying with dark peach-orange representing outright acts of prejudice and discrimination. Pink, again, points to peer relationships. The bulk of a story may indicate an experience with one facet of acculturation identified by the underlying color--such as school administrators in the first example and bullying in the second example--but specific details within the story pertained to another sub-category such

as family support, peer relationships, or discrimination. Collectively, this manner of coding reveals the intricate relationships among influences in the acculturation experience.

Data Coding Phase 6: The final phase of data analysis focused on synthesis and involved organizing coded data to focus on participant meaning and experience with the academic acculturation phenomenon. During this step, I developed code sheets by grouping all coded text into sections by color. In this way, all instances of similar experiences, themes, or meaning, compiled into a composite picture of that aspect of the academic acculturation experience. These composite descriptions of what participants experienced and how they experienced it (Moustakas, 1994) provided essence of the experience that Creswell (2013) points to as the goal of data analysis.

Design Issues

Krefting (1991) presents a model including four general criteria for reliability and trustworthiness true of both qualitative and quantitative studies: (a) truth value, (b) applicability, (c) consistency, (d) neutrality. These four criteria apply to research of any kind; however, these criteria must be defined differently for qualitative and quantitative research.

Truth value asks whether the research has established confidence in the truth of the findings, obtained from the discovery of human experiences as perceived by the informants. Some refer to truth value as credibility, which argues all research has a “single tangible reality to be measured” (Krefting, 1991, p. 215). Credible qualitative study presents accurate descriptions or interpretations of human experience immediately recognizable to those sharing the same experience. When establishing truth value, researchers examine applicability, consistency, and neutrality:

- Applicability—the degree to which findings can be applied to other contexts and represents the ability to generalize the findings to a larger population (Krefting, 1991).
- Consistency—the reliability of the data and whether the findings would be consistent if the inquiry were replicated with similar subjects in a similar context (Krefting, 1991).
- Neutrality—freedom from bias and degree to which findings are a result of informant testimony and conditions of the research and not other motivations (Krefting, 1991).

Strategies for Protecting Quality and Rigor

A major threat to truth value lies in the closeness of relationship that can develop between researchers and informants, potentially swaying researcher objectivity and/or participant response toward what they perceive as preferred (Krefting, 1991; Nash & Bradley, 2011). Since data collection involved only three contacts, the longest as a 70-minute focus group session, building closeness between myself and participants was not likely. Understanding the qualitative approach is reflexive, the researcher becomes part of the research and not separate from it, I continuously examined how my own characteristics may influence data gathering (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Luttrell, 2003; Nash & Bradley, 2011). I kept field notes throughout the research process (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Krefting, 1991) in order to address reflexivity. Luttrell's (2003) work also points to the value of keeping a personal journal reflecting the researcher's thoughts, feelings, questions, and hypotheses so that, through journaling, I might become aware of my own biases and assumptions and use that information to make choices that maintain the credibility of the research.

Triangulation strategies also enhance credibility. Triangulation centers on the idea of “convergence of multiple perspectives for mutual confirmation of data to ensure that all aspects of a phenomena have been investigated” (Krefting, 1991, p. 219). I employed triangulation strategies by comparing data collected by two different means: survey and focus group discussion. I also triangulated sources by comparing contributions from a range of informants, at differing times, and in five different communities. I compared the responses of participant group sets. If an enthusiastic response to a certain topic emerged in one group, I looked to see if the topic generated strong response in all groups. I explored ways in which the experiences of individuals of the same gender, same nationality, same language group, or same level of education aligned, or conflicted. Finally, theoretical triangulation tests ideas from diverse or competing theories. Since Acculturation Theory has many branches, and this study utilized additional theoretical foundations of Identity Theory and Segmented Assimilation Theory, a natural part of the analysis process involved comparatives.

Limitations

I identified five specific potential limitations to this study. First, the testimony of participants limit narrative survey and focus group data, which cannot encompass the sentiments of entire people groups or represent the experience of all refugees or all immigrants. Therefore, knowledge produced in qualitative study does not generalize to other people or other settings. By nature, the intent of phenomenological study is to provide a way to investigate human *lived experiences* (Van Manen, 1990) through the perceptions of research participants (Salmons, 2010) as a means of giving meaning to a phenomenon.

Second, since qualitative research does not make claims about generalizability, it becomes important to distinguish between what Maxwell (2005) calls “internal” and

“external” generalizability (p. 14). Internal generalizability refers to conclusions within the setting or group studied, while external generalizability refers to conclusions beyond the setting or group. Maxwell (2005) argues,

the value of qualitative study may depend on its lack of external generalizability in the sense of being representative of a larger population... it may provide and account of a setting or population that is illuminating an extreme case or type. (p. 115)

This study can lend insight into the lived experience of those encountering academic acculturation and represent a microcosm of those experiencing the phenomenon.

Third, since I have served as a general education classroom teacher in a district with large populations of immigrant and refugee students, my personal biases and idiosyncrasies may influence the results. While I took every effort to maintain neutrality, my own cultural understandings and history may have influenced my work at various stages of the project.

Fourth, both narrative survey and focus group discussion have limitations depending on the English proficiency of participant responders. In addition, focus groups have limitations based on group dynamics: how group members view the individual conducting the focus group as an authority, friend, or bystander. Additionally, focus groups using recording technology have limitations in the way participants may filter, censor, or fabricate responses upon awareness of recording.

Finally, limitations due to immigration status may play a role. The Iowa Policy Project executive summary estimates the number of undocumented families living in Iowa is somewhere between 24,017 to 37,118 (Sheehan & Pearson, 2007, p. 22). Therefore immigration status may influence some participant responses and/or omissions where protection of immigration status and documentation is a concern.

Delimitations

Participant criteria served as a delimitation to this study. Participants included only those who acculturated to Iowa during their teen years, with Iowa as their first location of enrollment in an American school. The selection of participants over the age of 21, rather than currently enrolled teens, was intentional. Past research (Bagnoli & Clark, 2010) and my own experience in working with middle and high school students has shown that teenagers have limited capacity to self-reflect. The *lived experiences* (Van Manen, 1990) of individuals with long-term perspective of acculturation process can better articulate those experiences. Including student participants over the age of 21 ensured record/testimony of academic achievement in terms of high school graduation, college enrollment, which are, in part, the goals of academic acculturation. Additionally, involving participants over the age of 21 means that participants have engaged in American culture for a range of 3-8 years, presenting a stronger likelihood of English language proficient participants, limiting potential misinterpretation on behalf of both the participant and the researcher.

Participant diversity was represented in a sampling of newcomers from 10 different countries and 15 different language groups. Focus groups were conducted in 5 different communities representing settlement across Iowa, thus sampling a subset of Iowa's newcomer population (Nagle & Williams, 2013).

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

My research set out to understand the phenomenon of academic acculturation through the lived experiences (Van Manen, 1990) of teenage refugee and immigrant newcomers entering Iowa schools. Toward that goal, I used qualitative methods gathering data through narrative surveys and focus group discussions. Qualitative data analysis involves working with data to organize it into manageable units, looking for patterns, to discover what can be learned and reported (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). This chapter presents the themes that emerged during data analysis, which supply a framework for developing a greater understanding of the teenage newcomer experience in Iowa schools. This chapter presents rich, thick descriptions (Geertz, 1973) to report findings using the verbatim testimony of participants as documented during survey responses and focus group discussions. Denzin (1989) describes rich thick descriptions as

more than record of a person doing, it goes beyond mere fact and surface appearances. It presents detail, context, emotion, and the webs of social relationships that join persons to one another. Thick description evokes emotionality and self-feelings. It inserts history into experience. It establishes the significance of an experience, or the sequence of events, for the person or persons in question. In thick description, the voices, feelings, actions, and meaning of interacting individuals are heard. (p. 83)

The testimonies presented in this chapter represent a diverse group of 18 participants, male and female, originating from 10 different countries, collectively speaking 15 languages. All

participants enrolled in Iowa schools as newcomers during their teenage years and are now over the age of 21.

The chapter begins with a brief introduction to the participants through their migration stories and the circumstances that led them to relocate in Iowa. Analysis of the data follows, pointing to the specific findings in regards to the four research sub-questions of this study: How does family influence academic acculturation? How does culture influence academic acculturation? How does school influence academic acculturation? How do relationships influence academic acculturation? The chapter concludes with a presentation of additional themes that emerged during data analysis, further answering the “grand tour” (Spradley, 1979) research question: What are the academic acculturation experiences of teenage newcomers in Iowa schools? Data provided in this chapter is presented as verbatim quotes in the voice, context, phrasing, and sentence structure of the participants’ reporting.

Participant Newcomer Journeys to Iowa

During data collection, participants described how they came to Iowa. Rather than include the full migration stories of all 18 participants, this section includes a collection of story examples from different countries of origin. Participants from El Salvador and Cuba both preferred not to answer questions about their migration journey; thus, their narratives are absent. Collectively, these stories reveal multiple and varying paths taken toward resettlement in Iowa.

From Burma

One participant explained that her family never intended to come to Iowa; but because of the isolation as the only family from her culture and language group in Tennessee,

her father sought another state with an existing community of refugees from Burma. She explained:

I come with my whole family from USCRI (U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants). Before that I am in refugee camp and the USCRI help us our family to come to America. We have been in Tennessee for one year. And then I were move to Iowa with my whole family because our community is a lot more there. It hurt to live alone with only your family without English. That's why I move to Iowa with my family.

From Kenya

A female participant from Kenya came to Iowa with her mother and younger brother. They had obtained refugee papers because her father served as a soldier in her home country and was killed in the war. She expressed, "One day they told us your Papa is dead. Now you must not stay here. They sent us to the camps, and we did the paperwork to come to America. Other people from the camp came to Iowa before."

From Mexico

A female participant explained that her father was mostly absent throughout her childhood, and she lived with her mother and five siblings in her grandparents' house in Mexico. She explained, "My dad came here [to Iowa] like 30 years ago. He wanted to bring us here, but it took a long time. He had to work to save for six people and it was very expensive." Her father worked with a roofing crew, which provided steady employment for about 10 months of the year. He returned to Mexico every year during the coldest part of winter when no roofing work was available. Eventually her father raised enough money for

the family to join him in Iowa. By this time, she was a teenager in 10th grade and recalled: “I knew my dad a little because he would come and go, but [I] never lived in his house before.”

From South Sudan

A male participant, 13 years old when he arrived in Iowa, told the story of escaping his burning village in South Sudan. He was sick with fever on the day his village was attacked:

I don't remember much. But, stories. There are many stories that my father told me. He said that we left in the middle of the night, which there was war going on at the moment. I remember burning houses. Smelling burning houses. Everyone like yelling. This is all that I remember. He said that we started walking. We walked for seven days straight. Like no, like we found food once in a while. For seven days straight. We walked to the nearest city to get our paperwork so that we could leave. I didn't know where we were going. We were going to a camp though, for sure. I didn't know where we were going. Actually, I wasn't supposed to come at all. My mother didn't want me to come at all. But, I wanted to go. I was like crying a lot because I wanted to leave. Everyone was leaving. My dad made three wives. My mom didn't want me to go. She wanted my older brother to go. But, he didn't want to go. He wanted to stay. I cried so much that my dad is like, yeah, let's just take him. After arriving in the refugee camp, his father received permission to file paperwork for only one wife; and he never did return to retrieve the rest of his family. Through the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR), this participant came to Iowa with his father, a step-mother, and 4 step-siblings. He stated:

I'm here now. I came with one of my step moms. My mom didn't come. She is still alive. I've got family back [in South Sudan]. I've got a sister. She has like seven kids now. All boys. I would like to meet them. I would like to meet my mother again. She is still alive.

From Thailand

One student explained that Iowa was the state assigned to her, but her family was separated due to delays in processing paperwork for refugee asylum. As a result, she arrived alone in America at age 14 with her brother, age 12. She recalled:

My family came to Iowa through refugee camp. We came to Iowa because the commission picked Iowa for us. When we came to Iowa it was February 2008 and it was snowing. We didn't have proper clothing. I remember it was very cold and all of the food was different. We needed help to get used to things and we had no parents with us.

Five participants in the study migrated from Thailand, however some were not Thai. At least two participants, one Burmese and one Karenni, indicated Thailand as their country of birth, because they were born in refugee camps in Thailand.

From Vietnam

A male respondent focused on the hope of America as the motivation that sustained his family during difficult years of trauma:

Life was really difficult in the camp. We have no choice to better our situation there. Only we know how to get out this situation. Even we arrived to U.S. we still have a lot of problem through language barriers and transportation. My first resettle is

located in Portland, Maine. Then we moved to Iowa because of job situation. We came to here with our hope and dream.

Through stories like these, refugee and immigrant migration experiences emerge.

Participant migration stories reveal the differences between refugee and immigrant experiences. Immigrant participants often came directly to Iowa because of a prior connection specifically promising employment, or family connection, or were drawn to an enclave cultural community already established.

The majority of refugee participants indicated that though Iowa was their first state of fulltime school enrollment, they initially spent time in another state for the purpose of language classes and cultural orientation. These placements spanned 4-12 months, and locations mentioned included Arizona, Florida, Maine, Tennessee, Arizona, and Rhode Island. As students shared their migration stories, they named the following refugee and resettlement sponsoring agencies in directing their Iowa relocation: Lutheran Services Iowa, the UNHCR, and USCRI. Regarding relocation sponsor services, one participant said:

The first day when I came to America was really difficult. I've been living in Thailand refugee camp for all years. I was grown up in camp and was 16 years old. My family moved to United States in 2009. I came here with my family. I came here as refugee and now living in Iowa for more than 5 years. I came here through Lutheran Service Iowa and they help a lot with household stuff and make appointment.

The various journeys taken to Iowa aligned with existing literature on the circumstances of migration common to Iowa newcomers (Grey, 2013; Stuecker, 2006). Having introduced a general understanding of participant backgrounds, in this chapter I

present an analysis of data and findings. Data coding and analysis resulted in 9 major themes and 33 subthemes as presented in Figure 4.1.

Research Question Findings Major Themes 1-5	Additional Findings Major Themes 6-9
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MT 1: Family <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Family Separation • Family Support • Lack of Family Support • Family Control • MT 2: Culture <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bicultural Identity • Native Language • Preference for Homeland • Religion • Culture Barriers • MT 3: School Personnel <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General Education Teachers • ESL Teachers • Principals • Support Staff • MT 4: School Academics <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School Language • Schoolwork • Academic Aspirations • Internal Efficacy • Inappropriate Placement • MT 5: Relationships <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Newcomer Parents and School • Newcomers and Newcomer Peers • Newcomers and National Peers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MT 6: Newcomer Mistreatment <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Experiences with Bullying • Responses to Bullying • Prejudice and Discrimination • MT 7: Culture Shock <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The First Day of School • Time Expectations • Clothing • Loneliness • MT 8: Fear Factors <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fear of Being Lost • Fear of Speaking Out • Fear of Speaking English • Documentation • MT 9: Newcomer Extremes <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Best Iowa School Days • Worst Iowa School Days

Figure 4.1. Major Themes and Subthemes Emerging Through Data Analysis.

The sub-questions of this study were addressed through the emergence of five major themes, with four additional major themes revealing unexpected findings. This next section presents findings specific to the research questions, beginning with the influences of family, then culture, followed by schools, and finally relationships.

How Does Family Influence Academic Acculturation?

Major Theme 1: Family

Analysis of the data revealed four themes related to family influence: family separation, family support, family lack of support, and family control. This section presents the data addressing family influence arranged by theme. The thematic discussions conclude with a summary response to the research question.

Family separation. Family separation emerged as a common theme among participants, independent of refugee or immigrant circumstances. Sometimes separation stemmed from families divided during crisis, as in the cases of fathers leaving their families to participate in war and some not returning. Children were also separated from family members in frantic circumstances, such as fleeing a burning village in the middle of the night or in dangerous border crossing events.

Some participants had experienced the death of a parent either as the result of war or due to sickness and poor conditions in refugee camps. In these circumstances, participants came to America with a relative or another adult who was a stranger to them; and some traveled alone as unaccompanied minors. In these circumstances, documentation for the participant had already been processed and approved; and traveling to America without the intact family proved preferable over circumstances in the homeland.

Other times, employment caused separation as the opportunity to earn wages in a location away from the family became essential for immigration to America. In some instances, families separated as one parent came ahead to Iowa to prepare for the family while the other parent stayed with the children in the society of origin.

Separation also appeared a common theme among immigrant participants separated from family during the migration process for safety reasons or in circumstances of divorce. As a result of the various modes of separation, many participants in this study either had only one parent with them in Iowa or lived with relatives other than their immediate family unit.

For some, migration paperwork created complications separating families. In circumstances of traditional immigration and/or refugee status, participants reported separation from family members because not every family member could obtain correct documentation at the same rate. One student from Thailand explained, “I came with my brother. We came to Iowa first. My mom, dad, and little brother came 6 months later. Then, 2 years later my sister came to U.S. After 3 years my family was all together.” While the participant did not explain where she lived during those first six months, she and her younger brother arrived as unaccompanied minors.

Two participants from African countries shared stories involving fathers with multiple wives, both immigrating with only one branch of the larger family still intact: the students received papers indicating them as a child of step-parents rather than their birthmothers. The participant from El Salvador and the participant from Cuba both indicated they had separated from their families during migration and lived with American foster families during their high school years.

Finally, one rather unique scenario led to separation of family. A female participant entered into an arranged marriage contract, according to the custom of her religion. She was sent from Iowa at age 15 to marry in Germany. However, the situation was not good, and she returned to Iowa. Upon returning, her mother refused to welcome her into the family home because she had brought shame by not following through with the marriage. At the time of

the study, the student was a 20-year-old, estranged from her family, working two jobs, and trying to complete her GED.

Despite the complications of family separation, all participants received messages about the value of education. While family members did not always support individual participants, strong support and respect for education in general appeared as a common theme. For the participants in this study, positive messages about education fueled the importance of academic performance.

Family support. Participants experienced family support in several ways, and many concurred with the sentiment, “School was number one priority in my family.” One student shared that she and her siblings had no supplies during their first year of school: “After that my dad would not allow [us] to accept binders and paper. My dad always buy that things for us. He said you guys are here now. I take care of you.” In addition to practical demonstrations of support, others received messages of encouragement and pride regarding their education. A participant conveyed, “They are excited. They really appreciated that we have the opportunity to go to school and all of this stuff. They would join us and they were always involved and have communications and feedback.” In response, another participant added,

We’ve seen other Asian people who have succeeded so we know that we can do it too. Now I have more hope on my brother and sister. I will be the first one to go to college for my family.

Some had parents who viewed school as the primary focus of migration as indicated by this participant, “The whole reason my mom brought us here is to go to school. She was on us. She had us wake up early in the morning. We used to wake up at 4:00 a.m. even though

school doesn't start until 7:45!" Such encouraging affirmations helped participants develop positive mindset toward schooling, which proved helpful when the transition was difficult. As one participant said "I am working so hard and so frustrate. I don't quit. I want to make everyone proud. They think American school is good and they want us to succeed. I try very hard to be good student for my family."

Lack of family support. Lack of support was presented through conflicting messages from siblings, lack of parental engagement with school, and criticism of the newcomer student--particularly in protest to the student adopting characteristics of American youth culture.

As an example of mixed messages from family members, one male talked about the support of his siblings, which came in a counterproductive presentation. Initially, his brothers' reports of Iowa education experiences inspired him to continue his education. However, his older brothers teased him constantly about his communication skills, thinking their joking might motivate English language acquisition:

My brothers liked the Iowa school. Two of my brothers, they go to [name of community college]. They just want to graduate and be something here. They make fun of me. But, I know it's in a good way because I don't want to speak English. They know when I was with them. I just wanted them to talk for me and they make fun of me. They know I'm shy and I don't want to talk in front of them because they make a lot of fun of me.

In this case, the siblings intended to be encouraging, pushing their younger brother toward success; yet the participant was hesitant to engage in some of the behaviors required for learning. This example resonates with literature on the immigrant paradox research (Aretakis,

2011; Fuligni, 1997; Portes, 2001; Rumbaut & Portes, 2001) in which newcomer immigrant children tend to be highly motivated upon arrival in American schools, seen in the achievements of the older siblings. However, strong motivation in older siblings may not carry over to younger siblings. In this instance, the younger child relied on translation skills of acculturated siblings to get by and delayed his own engagement in acculturation. When asked if he would like to go to college like his brothers, he said his English was not good enough, but he would help his family by working.

Students also perceived lack of support when parents were not involved with the school. Despite strong messages of support for education, parents often did not attend or engage in activities at school. One participant voiced, “My mom never went to school, like our school.” Another participant spoke about parental reluctance, stating that parents went into the school, “Only when they were forced. They’re busy. They’re very busy people. My dad worked a lot. My step mom worked a lot. They couldn’t make it to a lot of things.” The experience of verbal support for education was universal, but many students experienced disconnect when parents declined invitations to school events.

A prominent frustration among participants centered on the lack of engagement parents had with the school. Despite strong promotion of the importance of education, most parents did not visit the school, even when invited. Participants viewed parent absence as lack of support: “My parents weren’t very involved with my schoolwork and all that. They have a lot of things to worry about. But, they are not very supportive.” Another said, in regards to parents, “They never want to come.” Since parents were not involved in school happenings, students were hesitant include their parents in their struggles: “I don’t tell them.

I couldn't turn to my parents because they couldn't do anything about it. They don't understand."

Students also cited parent criticism of their efforts to adapt to American culture as another area of frustration. Newcomers reported feeling more accepted in school when they wore American clothing, hairstyles, and makeup similar to American teens. Feeling accepted bolstered confidence to interact with peers and participate more in class. Participants recognized Americanizing their appearance as a key steppingstone to feeling comfortable in school. However some newcomer parents criticized participant attempts to fit in, as one young woman explained,

When I watch a show my dad say you look like. In my country we don't really show [skin, arms]. When he say I look like something different or like [participant's name] anymore. Look same as that [American] woman. He say is bad.

This participant confessed that she dressed one way when leaving home, then changed into more American clothing and put on makeup when she arrived at school. Overall, parents of girls especially were highly critical of any changes to physical presentation. For example, when one participant "started wearing makeup. My mom say what are you doing? She said I look like a monkey." Another parent was opposed to hair dying, and the participant mimicked her mother saying "the hair color! You like--you look like a chicken!"

These interactions between parents and newcomer students align with the acculturation response identified by Gibson as accommodation and acculturation without assimilation (1988, 1998). In this response, parents tend to urge their children to accommodate to the rules and expectations of the new environment, but an explicit refusal to assimilate fully into the host culture surfaces (Gibson, 1988, 1998) for fear that their children

will abandon their heritage in becoming more American. Just as Gibson (1998) noted, students become skillful in navigating the dominant culture, but this strategy often causes conflict in the family.

Family control. Sometimes family members attempted to control newcomer teens in an effort to diminish Americanization. One participant said her parents would not allow her to participate in after school activities or become involved with choir because of the travel expectation for competition and performances:

Parents don't let you do anything. Like me, I wanted to be more open to opportunities and stuff. My parents are so afraid of stuff that could change [me]...they are afraid of culture shock and stuff. They are afraid to let [me] do anything.

One participant offered gender roles as the primary reason for restrictions:

For me I didn't get to do any after school activities... Part of it because our culture. I had to come home and help. Everyone was working. I do housework and make meals for my brothers. Sometimes I can't go to school because laundry or go with someone to appointments. My brother, he can stay at school and he can join soccer only, because he doesn't have to do housework.

Others had parents who refused to allow them to have American friends:

My mother said no American friends. If you go home with the people different, they cannot talk to you. They don't understand. They cannot talk. They won't end up saying anything. People say to me--when you go to America your kids will fly away. Now you will no fly away!

One final area through which families exerted control, especially over girls, related to adherence to religious practice, including culturally appropriate dress codes. A participant

articulated, “Now I wear hijab, because I choose it. But when I was a teenager, I did not want it. Veil to everyone tells I am not American. Now I wear it.” This participant grew emotional when describing the arguments at home during which her mother pleaded for her to not abandon her religion. Now a single parent, she lives in her mother’s home, aware of the shame she has brought on her mother and her brothers; and she dutifully wears the hijab:

It’s not of importance to me, I did not want to break my mom’s heart anymore. She has been through enough with coming to America. I didn’t know how much until many years. Now I always choose what my mom says or the father of my baby. They tell me always modest, modest. Now, I feel good because I like my clothes. I like what I’m wearing.

All the examples of family attempts to control oppose adoption of American characteristics. Yet participants indicated that adopting a more American appearance, especially in regards to fashion, was essential to belonging, which supported confidence to engage in the academic process.

Influence of Family Summary

How does family influence academic acculturation? Collectively, the data answers the question revealing four major themes of influence: family separation, family support, lack of family support, and family control. All participants in this study experienced trauma due to family separation. For some, the separation was permanent as in the case of death, imprisonment, or failed migration. Others experienced temporary separation due to staggered migration or employment necessitating absence. This finding aligns with the literature in two significant ways. First, it confirms Stuecker’s (2006) insights on the traumatic histories of Iowa newcomers. This alignment validates the authenticity and truth value (Krefting, 1991)

of my data analysis. Second, the evidence of past trauma due to separation aligns with Suárez-Orozco and Todorova (2003), who found that trauma as a result of family separation impacted newcomer identity formation.

Stories pertaining to supportive siblings who encouraged school success provides evidence of the theme of family support. Supportive parents encouraged their newcomer children to focus efforts on school achievement and openly expressed high regard for the value of an American education. However, some parents equally expressed lack of support in the form of criticism of the student and open expression of negative views of American education.

While families highly supported success in school, families predominantly opposed adoption of an American identity. Parents failed to understand the importance of social acceptance in relation to confident academic engagement. Many newcomers originate from countries where social interaction is not a classroom construct; therefore, parents cannot appreciate the highly social context of American school culture. Parents often met any effort to change identity in terms of extra-curricular activities, patterns of dress, or physical appearance with lack of support, criticism, or efforts to control the participant toward cultural compliance. Lack of support surfaced as verbal criticism and restrictions on activity. Themes of family control emerged, including restrictions on clothing to honor cultural and religious norms from the society of origin and adherence to traditional gender roles. However, participants admitted such control did not result in compliance, but rather rebellion and deceitfulness, as seen in the participant who refused to honor an arranged marriage contract, the teen who changed her clothes and put on make-up at school to avoid scrutiny at home, and the student who refused to wear hijab during her high school years. In each of these

instances, participants were motivated to fit into school culture but encountered parent opposition.

Cultural convictions fuel responses to family support, lack of support, and family efforts to control, thus demonstrating a clear connection between family influence and cultural influence.

How Does Culture Influence Academic Acculturation?

Major Theme 2: Culture

Culture plays an important role in acculturation according to Berry's model based on a culture-behavior relationship in which "individuals generally act in ways that correspond to cultural influences and expectations" (Berry, 1997, p. 6). Under the major theme of culture, five subthemes relating to cultural influence emerged in the data analysis: bicultural identity, native language, preference for homeland, religious influence, and cultural barriers.

Bicultural identity. Participants discussed the ways in which the use of multiple languages helped them identify as a member of more than one group; language became a primary mediator between cultures. According to Suárez-Orozco (1995), bilingualism and biculturalism allow newcomer students a dual frame of reference, which helps alleviate struggles in the transition to the new school culture. The theme of bicultural identity is presented in this section as a proactive strategy many students adopted to support successful navigation of the new school community. One student shared how good it felt when she could transition between languages: "At school to some people I know, okay to this person I will speak this language, this person I will speak this language. My friends have many languages, sometimes in one sentence we use different languages." Another respondent indicated:

For me having [to speak] both actually helped English a little bit more because you could say to students who wouldn't speak to you in English, or you could say in English so you just kept talking and you improve.

A third respondent confirmed the sentiment, adding:

I feel the same way because in ESL all you hear is not English, all of the other languages. When you go to other classes you hear other people speaking English and then you kind of learn too. It sticks in your head... You are not just hearing it from how you are reading and actually another American reading it. I thought that helps a lot.

These examples point to the value of multilingual ability. Some participants openly expressed clear desire to identify as bicultural or multicultural as a means of belonging to more than one group. In the following example, one student shares what he saw as the ideal model for acculturation through observation of peers:

The ones that did talk to you in the beginning. We're English and Spanish both. I also wanted to be both. I worried about that. But, I wanted to fit in here and fit in there. I thought I would fit in if I speak more English. They showed me it could work to be both.

Echoing the findings of Berry et al. (2006) and Suárez-Orozco, (2004), participant testimony about the benefits of multilingual navigation of the new society demonstrates to some extent the ways in bicultural identification may support positive efficacy toward academic acculturation. However, in the Iowa school context, school personnel sometimes assume newcomers to be bilingual, when in fact, they are not. One participant protested assumptions made about her because of her country of origin:

One thing that really bothers me is that because I am brown they think I'm ESL. This [English] is the only language that I even know how to read and write, I don't even know my own language. I know my mother's language. I was born in Kenya. That's something that I speak—Swahili. But it's not my language. I don't even know how to read it or write it. I am Kenyan and I am American.

This student attended an English school in her homeland; and while Arabic and several African dialects were part of her family heritage, she is an English speaker. She considered herself to be bicultural, but not bilingual. For this participant, ESL placement was a frustrating aspect of her acculturation experience.

Overall, students who were able to navigate school using more than one language were often able to identify as member of both their home culture and another group represented in the school culture. Identifying as a member of both groups became an important influence on the acculturation experience.

Native language. As previously mentioned, the ability to navigate the school environment using one's native language emerged as a vital consideration in academic acculturation. This section addresses participant data pertaining to native language both as a catalyst and deterrent to transition.

Half the participants in this study had schoolmates who shared their native language. Those with peers who shared a common language admitted language did not always serve as a reason for friendship at school: "Sometimes we used to have the same class and I know he speak like me, but he pretend he don't know me." Another respondent confirmed some students felt more American by not associating with fresh newcomers:

They tell a white person who show us school. The white person supposed to tell us. But I don't understand anything. The other Karenni know what he say, but they just look down. After awhile, like a semester or something we are friends, but at first Asian people pretend they don't know me.

Codes of conduct regarding tolerance for speaking native language in school varied greatly. Some participants indicated they were permitted to speak their native language in ESL classes. Others said they were only permitted sometimes. In some cases, students were restricted to English only:

We have to speak English the whole time. The rule is English only. In my ELL class we would always speak the language, we had to speak English. They don't let you use our own language.

Some respondents defended English-only approaches as beneficial: "One thing [is] the teacher. Because the teacher already knows their language. [She] is all English, we learn fast. When we all would communicate in our own language we learn really slow."

In a related discussion, students shared the open ridiculed they received for using their native language: "People made fun of sound of my talking. They laugh at our language." Another respondent shared that even other language learners made fun of certain accents:

I'm no good at people's name, the way I call the name. Once in my science class, I think science I was eighth grade at that time. My friend named Lisa and I don't know how to pronounce that so I'd call her like Leesa. Then one of my friends is ESL African, he's like what did you call her? Leesa? Then every time we were in science

class he always called my friend Leesa like I call her. It make my friend frustrate because they are making fun of her too. They always make fun.

Later in the discussion, this same student admitted, “It hurt me all of the time. It hurt the friend that is named Lisa.”

Many participants appreciated the freedom that came from navigating adjustment to Iowa schools using two languages as it allowed for identification with both their home culture and school culture.

Preference for homeland. Two participants articulated preference for the homeland culture, both identifying as immigrants. These participants had family members still living in their society of origin and expressed strong desire to return to their homeland. One participant explained:

Everything is better there. I have family. I have friends. They want to know my son. It would be easier because of no language barrier. My son is bilingual so he will do okay. Here the work is good. That is good. [But, there] it would be better than this. Everything here is a struggle.

Both participants identified lack of money as the only barrier to returning to their homeland. When I asked if they felt this way when they first arrived in Iowa, one participant said, “I never want to come [here]. I never want to leave my grandmother’s house. I was happy.” As a result of experiencing disappointment with Iowa settlement, these two students failed to develop connections to the school community.

Neither participant graduated from high school and may demonstrate characteristics of Berry’s (1997) separation response: the individual maintains his or her original culture and evades interactions with other cultures (Berry, 1997). In the literature, researchers refer to

these newcomers as separatists who are the least likely to acculturate successfully to the school setting, retaining the original culture and rejecting the new culture. Both respondents recalled their difficult transition to Iowa schools. Though they did have some good high school memories, they still struggle with language and, overall, wish they had stayed in their home countries.

Religion. A significant cultural influence stemmed from religious beliefs about appropriate educational topics for the classroom. Respecting the codes of their religious heritage sometimes meant newcomers did not participate in certain courses, commonly sex education. One participant specifically addressed Muslim cultural beliefs:

Yes. It's related to the culture. Especially religion. They don't like to talk about some of the things. Like the female in like the science subject. Parents don't want to sign papers [for permission to attend health classes]. They don't want their children to be involved in showing the growing of the body and changing. The body is private. They [Muslim parents] don't like it. They are the one to tell their children.

As mentioned earlier, religion also influenced expectations of dress, particularly for females. This explanation came from a male participant regarding his own views and observations of females wearing hijab:

She was saying, I want to be American. They [females] don't want to cover, to put a scarf on. And [they] disagree with the family, home and all these things. The girls, they should have to cover. The families are pushing them and they don't want it. Because when they come, they want to be American girls and they want to share new culture... But the parents, they don't want that... This is the religious [belief] and we want our kids to wear this.

Religious ideas about appropriate dress served to isolate students. In each focus group, at least one participant identified choice of clothing as a way to feel and/or appear more American, which fueled confidence to engage in the school community. Newcomers commonly felt uncomfortable, confused, and disconnected in the school environment; therefore, newcomers often viewed shedding religious markers like hijab as a significant step toward social acceptance.

For some participants, religion also restricted involvement in school social and extra-curricular activities. Some participants were not permitting to engage in dancing; thus, they did not have the option of attendance at homecoming, winter formal, and prom. One girl noted that her father refused to let her play on the soccer team because females showing their legs was contrary to their religion for females, and he would not approve of his daughter wearing shorts. The participants who reported not being allowed to participate in special school events and sports regretted the missed opportunity.

Culture barriers. The theme of cultural barriers came to light through the emergence of several sub-themes. The most significant culture barriers presented in the data related to misunderstanding of school culture and misunderstanding of cultural signals of respect disrespect.

Misunderstanding school culture. In regards to not understanding school culture, one participant explained:

In the beginning when the people arrive in the school, they come with a lot of suspicion because they don't know. They are afraid. Language is the big gap there. Language barrier is the biggest barrier. When they [newcomers] come, they don't

understand anything. Number one, the greeting. So, you see the kids one day when they first arrive, the first week, the first month, they are fearful.

Parents perpetuate that fear through concern that their children will abandon their culture as they adjust to school culture. Describing her parents' fear, a participant stated:

They want [us] to hold onto our culture but do well at school. Oh yeah. The kids learn the language. Kids become fluent in language. Parents, not. So, we have to tell them everything what it means. Like we tell the rules to the parents and they listen to us.

They don't like it. We don't listen to them because they don't know it.

Cultural misunderstanding about appropriate communication between school and home arose as a participant's parents did not understand why the school would contact them with concerns about discipline or missing work:

They don't want to be called. They [parents] say, this is your job, you have to do it, why do you [the school] call me? You do it, do your job. Parent don't understand how the system education is working here in America.

Misunderstandings about school culture may stem from extreme differences between Iowa schools and past educational experiences.

Misunderstanding cultural signals of respect and disrespect. Other cultural barriers included not understanding American norms such as actions of respect that differ according to culture. Specifically, participants described their realization of how respect is shown in American school culture. Eye contact occurred as one such difference: "Like in America people make eye contact. In our culture we don't make eye contact. If you are staring at people in our culture it's rude. Here it's really respect." A participant explained the confusion:

You have to change that. If you are talking to me, you can look at me, but when you talk to grandmother you have to not. I think now [I] learn a little bit. When I first go to school [I feel] like people staring and they were looking at me. Now I don't be scared when people are staring.

Another student added,

I did have that experience. I did not like looking people in the eye. In high school, one of my coaches, I wouldn't even look him in the eye. He was telling me about looking people in the eye and why that is. He was just saying that if you look people in the eye in America, it is a sign of respect and all that. I didn't know. I usually looked away or tried not to make eye contact. It was weird. Growing up I never looked people in the eyes. But, now as I grow up, it's kind of like...he told me so I know.

Yet another respondent clarified how this action directly opposes behavior expected at home: "Actually cultural-wise we're not supposed to look someone in the eye when talking to them or listen to them or anything. Until this day, I never look my mother in the eye. That's just the disrespect."

In a related example, a participant commented on inappropriate gestures between men and women in his culture:

Sudanese shake hands, yes. But they don't supposed to [touch] women they're not married to. I do understand it. I mean, I don't understand it. But, I do see that. The male, I think dominance back home. All males are dominant.

In addition to these cultural barriers, all participants in the study unanimously considered language as the most significant cultural barrier.

Influence of Culture Summary

Analysis of the data found that culture influences academic acculturation in regards to bicultural identity, native language, preference for homeland, religion, and cultural barriers. In acculturation literature (Berry, 1997; Szapocnik, Kurtines & Fernandez, 1980) biculturalism includes cultural behaviors such as language use, social identification within a group, and social habits of engagement including media engagement. Individuals are considered bicultural if they speak both the language of their heritage group and the language of the society of settlement, have friends in both societies and engage with media of both cultures (Schwartz & Zamboanga, 2008). Bicultural identification emerged a successful strategy for most participants. Students expressed strong desire to be part of both their culture of origin and their school culture, often emulating other newcomers who successfully lived in both worlds.

Use of native language emerged as a universal theme tied to culture of origin and cultural barriers in the society of settlement. All participants noted English language acquisition as the most challenging barrier to the newcomer experience. For all participants, once they acquired enough English to successfully navigate using two languages, transition became much easier. Students saw the merit of English language exposure in general education classrooms and commented on the value of hearing Americans speak and read aloud. Clarifications and instructions sometimes came in their native language, proving helpful; but not all participants could collaborate with another native language speaker.

Culture fueled homeland preference in cases where a strong pull to the homeland still existed due to preservation of original cultural identity and/or important relationships with individuals still living in that country. Participants who expressed homeland preference in

this study demonstrated a separation response to acculturation. According to Berry (1997), those who employ separation strategies maintain original culture and do not successfully interact with the host culture. Those who adopt the separatist mindset are least likely to acculturate successfully to the school setting (Sam & Berry, 2010). The fact that neither participant successfully graduated from high school aligns with Berry's (1997) theory of responses to acculturation.

Religion influenced academic acculturation mostly in newcomer perceptions of appropriate conduct in terms of classroom discussion, modest dress, and gender roles. For the most part, participants in this study adhered to their religious heritage, with the exception of girls who rebelled against religious dress codes to appear more like their American peers.

All participants in the study expressed varying cultural barriers encountered in the newcomer experience. These barriers included parents' misunderstanding of school culture, students' misunderstandings regarding cultural signals of respect disrespect, and misunderstandings pertaining to language. In some instances, as with the practice of making eye contact when engaged in conversation, the American code of respect contrasted with students' cultural training. Participants reported favorably those instances in which a peer or mentor provided direct explanation to help the newcomer understand American expectations.

Every newcomer arrives in Iowa with a cultural understanding nourished by experiences in their society of origin. As newcomers enter the American school culture, many challenges emerge. This next section considers the ways in which schools influence newcomer transition.

How Do Schools Influence Academic Acculturation?

Analysis of the data on how schools impacted academic acculturation presented overarching themes in two distinct categories. The first major theme pertains the influence of school personnel specifically represented in four subthemes: general education teachers, ESL⁴ teachers, principals, and support staff. The second major theme of influence involves school academics, through which additional subthemes emerged: school language, schoolwork, academic aspirations, internal efficacy, and inappropriate placement.

Major Theme 3: School Personnel

School employees had significant impact on student experience in diverse ways. Sometimes interaction between staff and students fueled positive and supportive relationships, and sometimes the opposite was true. One participant in this study, now

⁴ The distinction between *ELL* and *ESL* may prove helpful in reading this section. The U.S. Department of Education (2005) defines ELL (English Language Learner) as a national-origin-minority student who is limited English proficient (LEP). The National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition (2008) defines ELL as a student requiring targeted instructional support toward language development. ESL (English Second Language) on the other hand is “a program of techniques, methodology and special curriculum designed to teach ELL students English language skills, which may include listening, speaking, reading, writing, study skills, content vocabulary, and cultural orientation” (U.S. Department of Education, 2005). Throughout, I use ELL in reference to students and ESL in association with teachers and/or the classroom or learning environment; however, these terms are often used interchangeably in education. Participants likewise used both terms during data reporting, so both ELL and ESL appear frequently in this section without distinction.

working in Iowa schools, presented a rather profound commentary on his observations of teachers. He recounted his experience:

There is two types of teachers. There are teachers that they take education or the career as a part of the life. There are some teachers that take it as a way to get money and income. Those who take as income, they don't care. They just come and do their work and go home. Some take it as a life, as building a nation. So those kind of teachers I saw them they are really very good teachers. They care about those children. They care about them. Those who take life as income, they just come to whether the children are learning or not learning they don't care especially ESL. It's too much work with ESL.

Overall, participants encountered a range of teacher dispositions in their classroom encounters. In many ways, the words above summarize, to some extent, the experience of respondents in this study.

General education teachers. Participants had both positive and negative experiences with general education teachers. One student offered a favorable comment:

None of my teachers were enemies. They tried to help me out. There were a few teachers that would go beyond their measures and actually asked me if I needed help. Stay after class and actually help you. They actually want to help out. There's some teachers like that that are good teachers.

Even when general education teachers were approachable, they often misunderstood the newcomer's questions or failed to recognize where further explanation was needed.

Explaining how she navigated this problem, one participant described:

I take ELL math and after that I'll take regular class math. The teacher was nice plenty. She tell you have to do everything like she say. If you don't know and you can ask her. I would ask her like she does not understand me what I say. I say again. She was like she doesn't know. When I'll go talk with the ELL teacher and she explain me more so I understand.

Her words resonated with me as a former general education teacher. In my field notes, I wrote, "Gen Ed teachers rely on ESL teachers to fill in the gaps." While I'd like to think I treated students warmly and they felt safe in asking anything, I am aware of my own capacity for misunderstanding student questions. I often took comfort in knowing students had support in the ESL classroom, and anything confusing in my classroom could likely be clarified during study hall.

As a former general education teacher, I was unsettled by what the following student had to say. When referring to the way general education teachers sometimes responded to newcomer student questions, one participant recalled she sometimes felt as if the teacher were trying to publicly embarrass her:

Sometimes I feel like...I'm like are you trying to make fun of me? Every time I ask you he was like, "What, what? In front of all my friends and that sort of embarrassed me. Every time they'd be like, "What, what? I'm like when I ask my ELL teacher they understand me correctly, they understand me directly. When I asked you would be like "What, what?" in front my friends, like loudly. That's so embarrassing. Are you trying to make fun of me or something?

Another participant experienced teachers who would not take time to answer questions at all, stating: "Because there are a lot of people there, they won't explain the things again. When

we have questions, they just go and tell you and go to other people. They don't have the time to explain.”

In addition to not receiving answers to questions, participants provided specific examples of other challenges they encountered with general education teachers. One student recounted her confusion by advice to work harder: “Yeah. You got to work harder. You got to actually work harder. I was told that. What is harder? That doesn't work. I don't know what to do, I don't understand the work.” Another participant felt ignored by her general education teacher:

I am in your class one whole year and you never say my name correct. I am there one whole year and you never ask me about how am I going, do I have question, do I need help. Just give the class and the papers.

Lack of time and patience emerged as common challenges with general education teachers.

One student expressed his desire:

They [teachers] treat everyone the same. Be patient. Because I don't know the things that these kids know. These kids were born here. Half were raised here. They know a lot more. I would like to be treated different.

Participants emphasized they did not feel like teachers understood their situation as newcomers. One contributor expressed, “I would like to have the teacher understand the refugee situation. You ask us to write our story how we come here [referring to the study survey]. They never ask.” Explaining her educational history, another participant explained:

Teachers are great, to be honest with you. It's just once you are here for a couple of months, they just think that, you have to read, you have to do this. They push you to do stuff. But, really they don't understand the fact that when I was ten years old, I

didn't start school until I was eleven. Even in the refugee camp that was my first time of school. They didn't understand the fact that I did not know even hi or a no or a yes. None of that. It's like I didn't know how to spell anything out. I didn't know how to read anything. I know that you're trying to help me, but pushing me to do something that I really don't know. I never read before. I never spoke English before. I am fourteen and only have school for maybe two or three years.

A third participant nodded in agreement, "Not all of the camps have schools. My first camp had a school but I was too young. The next camp did not have school. No opportunity."

Recalling her past schooling experience, a refugee student compared the quality of her early education to her daughter's experience in Iowa:

To be honest, the schools that they had in the camp, just not good enough. I have a four-year old daughter that's going to be five in two weeks now. The English that she speaks and the way she writes and reads and all that. It's just amazing. I don't think a 14-year old kid back home could even do that.

These contributions prompted me to reflect on my limited knowledge of newcomer students I taught over the years. In my field notes, I wrote, "How often do we ask about educational histories?" I vaguely recall a conversation with a colleague in my earlier years of teaching during which I was cautioned not to inquire about immigration status of students. I don't recall the exact rationale for this recommendation; and now years later, I can speculate based on my experiences with newcomer students. That recommendation did, however, establish a pattern in my own approach: I failed to make inquiries of any kind. As the participants in the study shared their schooling histories, I realized not learning more about my students'

backgrounds may have been detrimental and in my field notes recorded a rather lengthy reflection on this topic, grappling with my own failure in this regard.

At times, teacher actions extended beyond misunderstanding to acts of outright discrimination. The words of one participant reveals:

Then okay I was in a PE class. The teacher is not used...we are mixed American, Mexican, Asian, no refugee and other people, but the teacher didn't treat us fairly. One day the PE teacher chose all of the Americans to play. He say "if you are white you can play." While all of the refugees stand on the side. We were just waiting and the bell is ringing so the time is over and we have to go change our clothes. I think that the teacher didn't treat us fairly.

In a similar manner, a respondent shared a story of a situation that arose with a substitute teacher who unfairly accused the newcomer:

One time in computer science class, he was actually a substitute teacher, but this one girl was making fun of the substitute teacher so she threw the Smarty's candy at the teacher's hair. The teacher got mad and she was asking who did it and everybody was pointing at the girl. She [the girl] knows I didn't speak English, I think it was just the first month and I didn't know any English so she pointed at me. I couldn't defend myself because I didn't know what to say, I just said no, no, no. The teacher came and looked at me and screamed at me, "Did you do this, did you do this?" Everybody was pointing at the girl, but she [the teacher] kind of ignored that and took it out on me. The girl also knew I didn't speak English and I didn't know how to defend myself. I thought it was really bad and I started crying because I didn't know how to defend myself.

Collectively, these stories representing student encounters with general education teachers point to some rather problematic experiences. However, participants shared different experiences with ESL/ELL teachers.

ESL teachers. Many participants made comparison between their ESL teachers and general education teachers, unanimously regarding ESL teachers more favorably. Participants noted distinct differences between ESL and general education teachers in both teacher attitude and instructional approaches.

Attitude toward students. Overall, participants found ESL teachers to be more accepting of learner difference. One responder made the comparison:

A normal teacher he just say one time and you know, you can do it. If not, that's your problem. The ESL teachers they understand or they know that you came from other [place]. They give us more time to just think about it and just to get the things going on.

A second student described the difference by expressing the ESL classroom felt like coming home:

To be honest with you, when I walked into ESL class ...I was closer to that teacher than any other teacher...Like I can relax. Other classes they treated us just like any other American kid. We just get thrown into a class and expects us to do everything. ESL room was just different. It felt like home to be honest with you. Even when I was in high school, I went to visit [teacher's name]. This is how much I really liked that guy.

Students referred to the ESL classroom as “home” multiple times in the focus group conversations:

Every ESL kid that's been to [name of school] will tell you about that lady. She's like a mother, a teacher. An amazing person. She will make you feel like home. She will try to teach you as much as she can. The easiest way with pictures. She used to treat us like kids sometimes. She would give us treats if we would do this or that and get it right.

Some participants sensed ESL teachers had a better understanding of students born outside of the U.S. and were more respectful of those from different backgrounds. One respondent expressed:

The first person who helped me in school is my first ELL teacher... Because she taught ELL so she got a student from Sweden, Mexican I think, Asians, Somali, all them, like all different country. She knew about refugee people. No papers, like for me...every kind. She helped a lot.

At this point in the focus group discussion, I noted the phrase “no papers – like me.” And beside that wrote “undocumented participants?” While immigration status is not a topic of focus in this study, the data suggested immigration documentation likely played a role in the acculturation experience of two participants in the study therefore emerged as a subtheme discussed in the additional findings . The limitations summary of chapter five contains more discussion related to this topic. This participant comment recognizes the ESL teacher as seemingly non-judgmental and supportive of all students, regardless of background. However, participants also saw merit in the instructional pedagogy of ESL teachers.

Approach to instruction. Students favored ESL instructors because the clarity of explanation and methods of instruction. The following example echoes many sentiments:

I had two different kinds of ELL teacher and my English ELL teacher like English, reading, writing, languages, they both really cared. They explain, give you the sign [visual aids], teach you steps, give you notes, anything and everything --- help you. She used to do everything. She used the Internet or something to help you to learn. Other teachers modeled entire processes so that even students without literacy skills could understand the components of assignments. One responder said,

When I have to write an essay she would help me with a whole essay that I can't write. We talked about the ideas and she type. She make me read the typings, so I say my own ideas. I did like this every section for whole papers. Introduction, bodies, conclusions, I read my words. I become a writer before I use the computer. It seemed like my English 4 teacher and my ESL 4 teacher are very different. My English 4 teacher he talked very long and he would ignore me when I asked him question because I think he doesn't have a lot of experience with the ESL student.

While students found differences in the approaches of general education and ESL teachers, they also provided data on other important relationships within the school. The next section focuses on student interaction with school leaders.

Principals. Data regarding participant experience with principals emerged in two subthemes: supportive encounters and disciplinary encounters.

Supportive encounters. Some participants recalled warm and welcoming school leaders, as in the following example: “When I talked to [principal’s name] I thought he was a teacher so I say hi. And he was like, ‘hey good to see you!’ He was like so friendly.” Another responder reported that her principal went out of his way to embrace diverse students by trying to greet ESL students in their own language:

He was so nice. Yeah. I don't remember his name. He speak Spanish. He talked to everybody. He was so nice. He tries to say good morning in every language, we are always laughing. It's so funny when he say our language! Every time he see us he try and say it.

Often, student encounters with the principal stemmed from disciplinary incidents. However, participants reported that the source of the trouble was not always the newcomer's actions but the result of bullying. In these circumstances, participants often expressed surprise to find their principal an advocate and friend. One respondent presented this story as an example:

The principal is like chief. Yeah, actually I feel intimidated by him. I tried to avoid eye contact or talking to him. One day on the bus I guess I got bullied and my friend talked to the principal about it. He [the principal] came to me and made me feel like I actually have support and somebody is actually looking out for me and not just alone. Because I was bullied and I didn't know who to turn to.

Another student was moved to tears of surprise by her principal's encouragement:

Yeah. One day I was in class... this girl, she told me "you have to go back to Mexico." So, I went to the principal. He told me that it's okay. I am going to be learning and it will get better. I am crying a lot, and not because she told me that. I was feeling bad. I was crying... Just I didn't know how to say thanks.

Acts of kindness came in other forms as one student explained her family's inability to conform with the school dress code and the principal's gesture to help:

Yeah, I have talk to principal when I was first moved. I had detention for him. Because in --- we don't used to wear any clothes you want or to dress up with dresses.

We have no money for this clothes. So I tell the principal and the next day he brings us the shirts we are supposed to wear.

While many participants reported positive and encouraging interaction with school administrators, most principal encounters revolved around disciplinary issues.

Disciplinary encounters. Some students interacted with the principal because their classroom behaviors warranted interventions. The participants reporting frequent interactions with the principal had encountered some kind of trouble. One participant reported:

Only if we get in trouble, or bullying or something. If not, they don't talk to us.

Probably it is easier for them because we don't understand. I feel like they are not giving enough attention to us. That's what I feel like.

A participant who works for Iowa schools commented,

Most of the ELL students they get in trouble easy because of the language. Because I was ESL student I am interested in these kids. Sometimes I will talk to the principal about discipline because they don't always understand the cause. Sometimes I can make suggestion.

Another responder ended up in the principal's office after using her limited English to insult a peer treating her unkindly:

When I was in seventh grade I think I talked to the principal once. Because the reason is really bad is because I say a really bad thing. I just got there and was feeling...I just feel overwhelm... I just feel like a [bad] word in English I want to say to her [another student]. Kind of like she always bully me so I don't like that... I stand up and go talk and say what I want to say. Then I go to principal because is really bad.

Listening intently to this story, another focus group member asked “What did the principal do? Was the principal angry?” The participant responded, “She seemed like she didn’t really care about me a lot more than other American girls. Like she doesn’t have time.”

Collectively, these examples of principal interaction with newcomers for negligent behavior and disciplinary interventions reveal relatively cold responses; however, this outcome was not universal. Other participants shared examples of disciplinary encounters that, upon reflection years later, somewhat baffle them. One student shared this story:

The only thing that I can recall was that one time I got in trouble. I was kind of treated differently because usually parents are called. You’re sent home for a couple of days. You get in trouble and their eyes are always on you. I’ve seen a lot of kids that that happened to. I was kind of treated differently because I didn’t know a whole lot. I really didn’t know. You couldn’t slap a kid in the face. But, the teacher was right there and I was mad and I hit that kid so hard. That was very disrespectful.

The participant went on to explain that she was not disciplined for this offense:

It was undeserved. No. I should have been punished. You can’t slap people! But they know calling my parents would just confuse, so he [the principal] just explains to me not to do that and I went back to class. That was crazy.

Some students experienced extreme frustration due to limited understanding of language and/or school culture and expectations. The inability to express themselves clearly often resulted in physical demonstrations of intense frustration. While these particular examples did not include evidence of principal intervention, they demonstrate the kinds of behaviors that often land students in the principal’s office. Below, I include three examples presented by participants:

- I don't think they understand where I was coming from when I was mad and giving them attitude because I really didn't understand what they were telling me to do. It was making me mad because I didn't understand anything. I was mad at myself mostly. Not at them, because they were trying to help me.
- I used to get in trouble because I used to get mad at paperwork that they gave. I didn't know what to do. I got frustrated a lot... It built up. That anger like built up. I never let that. No one understood that. It built up and I got in trouble a lot. I would just kick the wall or scream because I didn't know how to express.
- I got kicked out of school because I have bad temper all the time. I just didn't like being told what to do. Schoolwork. I got frustrated... I would get mad. I didn't know how to explain it... I got in trouble a lot when I was younger. A lot. I was suspended many times.

These examples reveal the kinds of behaviors newcomers exhibit due to frustration with the acculturation process and provide evidence of the many non-academic challenges participants encounter. These examples support the need for strong advocates in many areas beyond curricular instruction. The next theme looks at the various individuals within schools who provide advocacy and support to newcomers.

Support staff. The data revealed several branches of school employees who impacted students' lives in positive ways. These individuals included teacher's aides, counselors, support instructors in specialty programs, nurses, and translators.

Several participants attended schools where they encountered support staff who were, at one time, newcomers themselves. One participant described the difference it made:

I didn't want to be here. I wanted them to send me back. But, they didn't want to send me back to El Salvador. I think the teacher knew I wasn't understanding... They would get her in there. She didn't speak my language. But, trust me, just the matter of fact that I know she was a refugee before. She understood me a little more. She would explain it to me calmly. I got the hang of it. At first, it was bad.

Seeing the benefit in having support staff in the school building who spoke the students' native language, a participant shared: "Sometimes when they know people who talk their language, they like it better. They become happy when they see people talking in their language." One participant who admitted to demonstrating bad behavior during his transitional years in Iowa schools, reported almost daily interaction with one support staffer until his behavior finally improved. He described his journey:

I used to get in trouble every single day. Every single day. I used to get sent home. That's how me and [name of support staff/translator] got to know each other. He used to come to school every day to translate and just to help me out. Until my middle school in my 7th grade year, my dad kind of got fed up. Because he had to leave work all the time to come. One day I just said I can't keep doing this or he will lose his job. Then that's when I kind of stopped. Going into high school, I never got into trouble again.

This same participant indicated his translator as one of the most important people in his early acculturation: "He kept coming to school. They would call him and he would come, calm me down."

At other times, common language, or immigration circumstances were irrelevant; and the bonding factor was simply in the manner of communication. One participant described his experience of having someone speak to him in the way he wants to be spoken to:

With helpers it was, no, it wasn't about the color. The way you guys speak [referring to the researcher] and the way they [referring to school support aide] talk, is completely different. Like right now for me, when I am speaking to someone from my country, not my country, but someone who is actually from Africa that's a refugee that just came to America and they barely speak English but they speak some. I talk to them the way that they want to be talked to. I don't speak English like I speak with you. I try to make them understand as much as I can with my simple words and using my hands. I felt like that's what [name of support aide] was doing. Talking to me like I wanted to be talked to.

One participant explained the problem of truancy, crediting the truancy officer as the one person who kept her in school; otherwise, she would have dropped out. She said,

I just wanted to be home. I didn't want to come to here in the United States. I wanted to stay in Mexico. So, when we get here, I didn't want to go to school. So, it was a difficult time to start. I miss the school a lot because I just was skipping school... It was like two years then I started going to school regularly. They would send Mr. [staff member's name] to my house to bring me to school. Every day he told me I will be successful one day if I go to school. He drove to get me over and over.

Additional measures to insure student support included special programs such as family counseling services, as this participant shared:

I come to high school they had a program for my family. If I need help, I would go to them and I can bring my brother too because he is having problem. The counselor is also Asian like us and talk to them. And they would do their best to help me with whatever they can.

Other specialized programs included parenting classes for young mothers, a blessing to one participant who explained,

I always had that person that I actually, I don't even call her teacher really. I call her a mother because she really helped me out a lot. She helped me with parenting classes. She helped me with everything that I could think of for my baby.

As a compelling example of support staff, one male participant described his relationship with the school nurse, summarizing their relationship:

In middle school I used to be close to my nurse because I went to her on a daily basis. It wasn't just 'cause I was sick. It was just to talk to her. She made me feel good. Just to feel good. Sometimes it was because I was sick. She helped me a lot. She taught me a lot of things. I don't know why but... There were many things. We had deep conversations. I don't know. Deodorant. I used to go to class. I didn't know what it was. I was like smelling like BO and she said yes, you need to use this at a certain age. You do, you know? I honestly did not know until she told it.

These varied examples reveal the important role played by understanding support staff from diverse backgrounds and the positive impact these individuals have on newcomer experience. In the following sections, the findings on school influences shift from student experiences with school employees to the academic aspect of school culture.

Major Theme 4: School Academics

As I analyzed the data pertaining to the academic aspect of school acculturation, five sub themes emerged including school language, schoolwork, and academic aspirations, internal efficacy, and inappropriate placement.

School language. Unanimously, participants pointed to English language acquisition as the most important factor hindering adjustment to Iowa schools. As a respondent sincerely conveyed, “If I have a magic wish I would be able to speak English right away.” Another participant replied, “The biggest challenge when I am beginning in Iowa is culture shock, pretty much all over. It took me forever to learn English. That was probably the hardest thing right there.”

Some felt more focused time on language acquisition would have been helpful: “It would have been better if you just had ESL classes for the first year. Don’t let me go anywhere else, just ESL for one year.” Another contributor said, “I tried and I tried... I had a teacher [ESL] told me every time I was doing good. Everybody goes from zero to something. I tried more English. In other classes nothing. Just in ESL class.”

Those slow in their progress experienced continual reminders of their deficit by teachers, as one participant noted:

It made me embarrassed when I’m trying to speak and people not comprehending what I am trying to say. People not understanding what I’m trying to say. People responding with “what did you say?” or “can you say it again?” I just didn’t like that. But, it did kind of make me feel bad a little.

In a discussion of how newcomers feel about being corrected in class when trying to speak English, the responses were mixed: “Sometimes, oh thank you for telling me. Now I know.”

Another student admitted,

It depends on my mood I guess. If they correct you too many times then you feel irritated a little bit. Sometimes I thought it was helpful. Sometimes the expression and the way they talk when they [correct my] speaking shows they are irritated.

Participants encountered unrealistic linguists expectations. While newcomers were still in the emergent stages of English acquisition, they engaged in content area courses as well.

Participants were often not able to comprehend instruction in these classes and lacked conversational skills needed to seek clarification.

Participants expressed more concern about not being able to communicate with teachers than with peers. While newcomers could opt to converse with peers or not, they needed to communicate with the instructor. For example, “Talking to teacher is needed. Talking to teacher is how you learn. Talking to teacher for everything to understand school work.” Another participant said, “The hardest for me is to communicate with my teacher. In the other classes [not ESL] I understand nothing. I want to talk but I have no words.” Other responses included: “It's a lot when you don't speak English. Reading, writing, it's a lot” and “communicating with other people was most difficult, especially with teachers, I didn't know what to do.”

Other participants identified different methods of teacher communication as helpful:

I don't know. You guys [referring to teachers] would use big words that I never heard before. I'd go, what does that mean? I don't even want to think about it. The more I think about it, the more I feel dumber.

Adding to this, another student explained the benefit of teachers who have a slower pace and speak with more expression and body language:

Basically, it's how fast everything goes. Really, most of us prefer talking with your hands like when teachers use their hands to explain it. Like showing us what you are doing with [gestures]. Hey, I'm picking up this bottle and putting it there. Things like that. That's helps a lot.

Participants consistently reported full awareness of their English language abilities. In order to successfully comprehend all communication in schools, participants both required translation services for their own comprehension and provided translations services in support of others. Students who attended schools providing translators at school events, parent conferences, and/or disciplinary meetings tended to have more positive words about the parent school relationship: “Yeah. My parents can come to school because there is a translator. They know the person is walking with them and to help them. If they don't have it they don't know what's going on.”

Students shared various scenarios in which translators were needed, often identifying who served as interpreter:

- “Uh, yes it was my cousin. He been here like ten year. Yeah, he know pretty much English. He would interpret for me.”
- “My brothers read my assignment and tell me what to put. I read, I don't know it says. They tell me do this. Then I know what to do is correct.”
- “If the school doesn't give it, then my cousin come to school for meetings. He has to work, so not every time.”

- “When we first came here, the case-worker also helps to explain. She doesn’t speak Thai, but she will tell them if we are coming there [to the school office] and we need the help.”

Sometimes during school hours no person who spoke the language was available to provide the service through either the school or the community: “I was alone. No one in my school spoke my language. They have it for Spanish, but not for my language.” In instances which no translator was available, it became the newcomer student’s responsibility to translate for family and community members both inside and outside of school, especially needed when the language was uncommon in the school.

Students translated for parent-teacher conferences and made phone calls home to parents when a sick child needed picked up from school--even if that child were not a relative. School principals called on older newcomer students to translate during disciplinary meetings, if no adult translator were available. Students admitted they grew into the responsibility of serving as translators over time, as they were not capable of translating adequate for many years: “Right now yes. But when I first came, no.” More than one participant noted the strange role reversal that comes with translating for a parent. Referencing parent-teacher conferences, a participant stated: “I would just tell what the teacher says. I would tell her [referring to mom] everything what was happening. It was weird.” Parent teacher conferences were especially important times for clear communication as the only opportunity some newcomers had to make concrete connections between home and school.

Schoolwork. As mentioned, participants faced academic complications due to language barriers and poor communication with teachers. In addition to these obstacles,

responders shared some specific challenges with schoolwork. One area of challenge for newcomer students comes with the expectation of independent work completed outside of school as homework. One contributor explained why bringing schoolwork home was unsuccessful:

Usually they'll give you your homework. Tell you to take it home. If I take it home, there's no help at home. Because my mother doesn't speak English. My brother is the same thing. It's like whose going to help me out? I used to take the paper and bring it right back.

Another student explained it impossible to complete work independently if she didn't understand the concept. She said,

I used to get in trouble for not finishing work. That's one thing that I would get into trouble with. "How come you didn't do your homework?" It was like maybe because I didn't understand this homework. How do you do it? Math—Oh my gosh!

Frustration used to come from math! I used to have a hard time with math.

One newcomer found the use of computer tools particularly distracting and explained the problems faced by those who don't have access to digital tools at home by giving this recommendation:

I think I would prefer no social devices. Technology I mean just because you can get so distracted. And you are NOT doing what you wanted to do. At home we don't have that so the homework of looking things on computer I can't do. I have to go to public library but they close by 7, so it's a problem.

Collectively, participants expressed that success with schoolwork was most likely when students were given time in class to work independently while having instructional support

close by if needed. Overall, newcomers viewed the expectations of homework as problematic aspect of Iowa education and one that was not easily overcome due to limited resources at home.

Academic aspirations. In a study of academic acculturation, researchers must consider the educational aspirations of the participants. Participants overall did not receive many positive messages about long-term educational opportunities. In fact, many participants noted no one presented them, as ESL students, with college enrollment information. As one student reported:

After I graduated my friend told me to come with her to talk to the counselor if you go to college. My friend is going there so I listen too. But in my high school they don't talk to me, they don't like me to know nothing, I just graduated. They think okay, good for you, done.

Another student explained that personalized communication about college was withheld:

They talked to us about college like in assembly. But they didn't provide a lot of information like ask you direct "do you want to go to college?" If they asked me I would have said I want it. But I didn't go.

Still, others felt teachers were selective about who they shared information with and the opportunities were not presented equitably as this participant reported:

Most teachers would look out for their kids that are really smart. They would be like, you should apply for this scholarship and you could get into college. They don't do it with the refugee kids because they don't think they have a chance at college. I think that's unfair.

Educational outcomes of participants in this study varied greatly. Nine participants did not graduate high school, but two non-graduates completed their GED through an Area Education Agency (AEA). Among the nine who successfully graduated from high school, two continued with non-degree track ESL courses at a local community college, two enrolled in AA degree programs at 2-year colleges, and one is currently pursuing a four-year university degree. Table 4.1 presents the educational standing of participants at the time of data collection.

Table 4.1

Educational Standing of Participants

Possible Standing	Number of Participants
Did not graduate high school	9
Successfully graduated high school	9
Completed GED after exiting K-12 system	2
Currently enrolled in community college ESL courses (non-degree)	2
Currently enrolled in AA degree program	2
Successfully completed a 2-year AA degree	0
Currently enrolled in 4-year degree program	1
Successfully completed a 4-year degree BA/BS degree	1

The oldest participant in the group earned a bachelor's degree in education and is employed in Iowa's K-12 school system. All participants currently work full-time and/or attend school as full-time students at the post-secondary level. One student currently enrolled as full-time university student said,

I think one of the problems is that most students don't know their resources. They could help...like I got help from upward bound and they helped me through the college process. Most refugee kids don't get that... It would help if their ESL teacher would tell them... "Oh this program could help you become successful and help you

through the college process.” I think it would be really helpful if somebody let them know about their resources to use.

A final thought on advising students to continue their education came from another participant, “ESL teacher should maybe try to get involved more with this and really help them see what their future holds. They [newcomer students] have a future and not just to graduate high school and go to work.”

Newcomers expressed desire to understand their future options, and as indicated in these examples, some confessed that they would have liked to have the opportunity if it had been explained to them. These internal motivations are further uncovered in findings pertaining to internal efficacy.

Internal efficacy. Participant testimony often indicated a keen sense of personal awareness, revealing internal process. Internal efficacy refers to an individual’s ability to understand and participate in a cultural system. This includes the ability to self-evaluate and judge one’s own contributions and personal responsibility for success. Participant testimony demonstrated internal efficacy in terms of academics, behavioral motivations, and cultural awareness.

As revealed in earlier quotes, the student who reported only have two or three years total school experience by age fourteen was self-aware, realistically acknowledging her lack of schooling and cognizant of her own learning gaps due to limited opportunity. In addition, she was able to recognize misunderstanding in her teachers, “They didn’t understand... I know that you’re trying to help me, but pushing me to do something that I really don’t know.” Another student astutely pointed to problematic classroom practices for students with limited English skills:

Making ESL partners is sometimes in the class. Like in the big class it doesn't work.

Some ESL never talk. And maybe the other Spanish or English or some people they never talk. When they make a partner. The other people like you. You never talk. And

I never talk too. We'll make a partner. Just smile.

As a classroom teacher, I could clearly picture the scenario this student described during which two poorly matched students look at each other blankly not understanding what to do next. I found this example interesting because it clearly demonstrates the extent to which newcomer students capably self-assess.

Pertaining to self-awareness in disciplinary matters and behavior one student described interactions with the principal, while astutely reveling a keen understanding of his own internal process at the same time. The participant admitted he did not like being told what to do; and in his experience, whenever he refused to cooperate with the teacher, the principal was called in to reason with him. He explained:

It wasn't really negative. But, I took it as negative then. I used to get mad to be honest. I used to have a lot of anger issues. If I didn't understand things. I didn't really speak English. I remember this was back in middle school. The teacher would talk to me and try to understand something that she wants me to do, like read a book or something. I wouldn't understand. The principal would take me out and try to talk me into it. That wasn't working. But, I felt like it was negative because he was telling me, "hey, you need to do this!" I already had an issue with the teacher telling me that.

I had bad years.

Similarly, another participant who admitted to demonstrating bad behavior during his transitional years in Iowa schools, described his journey:

I used to get in trouble every single day. Every single day. I used to get sent home.

That's how me and [name of support staff/translator] got to know each other. He used to come to school every day to translate and just to help me out. Until my middle school in my 7th grade year, my dad kind of got fed up. Because he had to leave work all the time to come. One day I just said I can't keep doing this or he will lose his job.

Then that's when I kind of stopped. Going into high school, I never got into trouble again.

All these examples speak to the internal process of the newcomer transition, acknowledging the ways in which newcomers perceive and weigh their own motivations and understandings.

Inappropriate placement. An unexpected finding pertaining to school academics was the inappropriate placement of newcomers in special education programs. As indicated in the testimony presented thus far, focused instructional support is an absolute necessity of all learners, but specialized support is required for newcomers entering Iowa schools. Three participants in the study indicated that they had Individual Education Plans (IEPs) as part of their educational program. This designation provided them with special education services. One student explained he did not want this kind of intervention, "Yeah, I was having IEP then. I don't want them to be treated like special education, but just give me a little more time. Give special consideration. I am not having disability." Another student explained, "I don't want to be treated like... the special kids. I first need language so I can communicate then I can learn. Special education was not my problem." These findings relating to inappropriate placement in special education reveal another area of school influence on certain newcomers engaged in the academic acculturation process.

Influences of School Summary

In response to the research question regarding the ways in which schools influence academic acculturation, an analysis of the data revealed two distinct major categories of influence. The first category pertains to the influence of school personnel specifically represented in four subthemes: general education teachers, ESL teachers, principals and support staff. The second major theme of influence involves school academics, through which additional subthemes emerged: school language, schoolwork, academic aspirations, internal efficacy, and inappropriate placement.

Data was consistent with the literature (Lopez et al., 2002), showing secondary students seek support within the school for both personal and educational reasons. Findings confirm students will utilize adult support within the school to navigate the stressors and pressures of acculturation. Teachers, principals, and support staff were all found to have positive influence on student acculturation experiences, with ESL teachers playing a particularly favorable role, supporting Suárez-Orozco et al. (2009) finding that close and confiding relationships in the school environment increase academic engagement.

Findings revealed a startling imbalance in terms of student perceptions of teacher helpfulness and support. Overall, ESL instructors were viewed as highly effective, compassionate, and more understanding of the newcomer journey. ESL teachers created environments viewed by students as “home”-like, a safe haven within the school building. ESL teachers displayed respect for native language and customs. In contrast, general education teachers received mixed reviews with indications of impatience, unapproachability, lack of understanding, and discriminatory behaviors. Data provided evidence of teachers perpetrating acts of discrimination—an outcome not addressed in the

current literature and explored further in the upcoming additional findings pertaining to newcomer mistreatment.

The second major theme revealed in analysis of school influences involved school academics, through which additional subthemes of school language, schoolwork, academic aspirations, internal efficacy, and inappropriate placement emerged. Findings related to school language confirmed literature pointing to English language acquisition as instrumental for social engagement in schools, essential to comprehension of curricular content and the primary precursor to academic success (Cheng and Fox, 2008). However, participants reported problematic expectations regarding the rapid pace of language acquisition.

In terms of additional schoolwork concerns, participants confirmed a lack of school support at home, aligning with Stuecker's (2006) explanation of limited resources and skills available in newcomer households to adequately support student homework.

In terms of academic aspirations and continuing education, data provided evidence that newcomer students are not presented with the same level of support and guidance toward continuing education after high school graduation. Of the 18 participants in this study, only half graduated high school prior to the age of 21. Of those who graduated, only four went on to pursue post-secondary degrees.

Despite language barriers, participants revealed very keen understanding of their own internal process. As they grew to understand the expectations of the school culture, they demonstrated awareness of their own ability and limitations. Participants presented testimony about how they overcame negative behaviors and acknowledged their own responsibility for certain challenges faced in the acculturation process. This internal awareness was demonstrated in the testimony of the student who finally stopped misbehaving in school after

realizing the effect his behavior was having on his father: “One day I just said I can’t keep doing this, or he will lost his job.”

Internal efficacy was demonstrated in the ways students described their own lack of understanding and need for support. Participants self reflected on their own concerns pertaining to inappropriate placement in special education programs and student perspectives on Individual Education Plans. The finding of particular interest to me reveals in the following statement from one participant: “Every school that I went to, they never had ESL. I don’t know why. I had like IEP stuff in classes that helped me out. But I never had much ESL to be honest.”

I had three instances in my field notes where I noted newcomer comments about their IEPs. Interestingly, later when analyzing the data collectively, I realized all these students also mentioned attending school without structured ESL programs. I asked myself, “Does every newcomer get specialized support in some capacity?” I considered this question when analyzing the data and found it true. The majority of students had direct experience with isolated ESL instruction, spending a portion of each day getting language support and tutoring for general education subjects. The three students not assigned to ESL classes had IEPs, which assured them support and additional instruction through the special education department. One student admitted that his IEP was behavioral, explaining that he was angry all the time because no one understood him. However, this same student expressed how much he loved school as he grew older for the social aspect of it, and he eventually became very popular.

How Do Relationships Influence Academic Acculturation?

When considering newcomer relationships and academic acculturation, there is some crossover with findings pertaining to other research questions. Understandably, foundational relationships within the home drive family influence and newcomer relationships with school personnel significantly impact the ways in which schools influence academic acculturation. Therefore, this section includes some ideas that correlate with discussion of family and school influences. This section looks specifically at three kinds of relationships significantly influencing teen transition to the school culture, not addressed in the findings thus far.

Major Theme 5: Relationships

I identified three additional relationship themes in my analysis of the data: relationships between newcomer parents and schools, relationships between newcomer students and newcomer peers, and relationships between newcomer students and national peers⁵.

Relationships between newcomer parents and school. Overall, participants expressed strong desire for their parents/guardians to be more involved in their school and to have a better understanding of school demands and expectations. Expressing the wish that parents would attend school events, one contributor said:

I wish they come sometimes. They are invited. They never want to come. They said “why is the difference that we come...we don’t understand whatever they said or whatever they are doing.” So they never wanted to come. I would like if they come to see my school.

⁵ The phrase ‘national peers’ describes non-ESL peers in the Iowa school setting.

Another participant added even if parents showed up at school event, they wouldn't know how to participate: "[If] they come they don't speak English and they don't know what to say so they won't come."

Some students indicated parent involvement was not clear: "I don't know if they are supposed to come, I don't remember. No one tell me they should be at school. I never have trouble, so maybe the reason."

One girl confessed her mother did come to school once; but because of the reaction of others, she never wanted her mother to come to school again:

When in eighth grade I had a science project that we had to make a big poster and then they have a dinner with the parents and also the children. Because we have to make a poster and they would have to take it to school... Everyone could come and look at it. I did one too. I did one so I put my poster on the top it's in science class so we have to compare plants with different materials. My mom she came because we got invited. My mom she came she dressed normal, my mom she dressed her outfit all the time, like our cultures all of the time. One of the other person parents she kind of stared at mom. I saw her and it was like can you just turn your face can you stop staring at my mom? I felt poor in that. My heart is just pain.

The student expressed mixed feelings of pride and embarrassment. She was pleased her mother had the opportunity to see her accomplishment: "We got invited because of the projects I did. I got award for the project because...I think mine was top two." Yet she was also embarrassed: "the people is staring like they think my mom is dressed like costume." She continued the story,

My mom she don't speak English so she did stand by me. She just look around because the teachers don't talk to me. She wanted to talk and give them a feedback. She think projects is nice and she like everything, but she can't because of she cannot communicate.

Another respondent confessed annoyance with her parents' focus on grades and wished they would take more interest in other aspects of her school experience.

Because they don't know how to speak English right there is already problem there. Just when they would go to conference they would have to worry about always my grade...I want them to learn American school has so many things. I want to show them everything. My brothers make pictures to show and everything. They just want grades."

Most Iowa schools require parent attendance at conferences. This topic evoked varied responses ranging from indifference--"They come, they don't come"--to stories of humiliation and experiences evoking strong emotion:

My dad did [come to parent-teacher conferences]. You know what my dad said, he tried to like say, he said like good morning teacher. He was trying so hard. Was he nervous. My ESL teacher was laughing, not laughing out loud...Like warm, like it's okay. That's not how you're supposed to say it.

While the teacher was well meaning, and this correction may have seemed natural to an English language instructor, the teacher's response made the parent uncomfortable. Several participants shared experiences involving an uncomfortable circumstance, usually related to language barriers that resulted in parents only visiting school once and never returning.

Another participant gave this example:

For me when I was in [name of school] my parents invited conference or something.

My dad he went to go to restroom. He just went to a girl restroom. Oh my God! I kept following him. He don't know how to read a triangle is a girl and with two straight legs is a man.

At the conclusion of this story, another person at the table commented, "no restroom signs in refugee camps," and everyone laughed. This prompted another student to add, "We laugh now we understand everything. But when we are younger it makes us angry."

Those who experienced positive relationships between parents and school provided evidence of the ways in which some schools made special effort to build relationships with newcomer families: "They have a translator. My dad was so happy someone speak his language. My teacher say good things about my work and my dad is understanding everything and he is so happy."

Another said, "Sometime they miss conference, because of [my uncle's] job. The job far away from where we living. So they can come at night. The school make special times for night and on Saturday. So then my family can go." One student explained that instead of simply announcing parent teacher conferences, the school actually called to invite the family:

The teacher called my house. Asking my parents "What time you will come?" She say she will make a good time. The principal call to my house "What time you will come?" so my parents know they want you to come.

A participant who now works in the Iowa school system explained the impact of personal invitations and cultural events:

Parent attendance improves. When they come and see the situation is for them and they come and see everything is good for them, for their children, they want to

continue. When they come and see their culture celebrated with flags and they know somebody interpret for them...[they] want to be part of the school, come to the school. See what the teachers are doing.

This participant who has the unique experience of being both a refugee newcomer and now an Iowa school employee explained the importance of educating parents: “Yeah, you have to tell them. They do not understand this is for them, and this is expected.”

One participant connected her mother’s presence with comfort and security, especially important during her first unsettling year:

Yeah. She would go to the conference and all that. She came other times too. It used to make me feel better because sometimes our case worker, she was sweet too, she would bring her [my mother] over to the school. On our lunch breaks. I would get to see her. It would make me feel better. Like when I was new. Like really...I used to act so smart when I see her. I’d act like I know everything. I’d show her around like, we do this, we do that, and all that. Conferences were one of my best things. I didn’t speak English or anything but I was always a good student.

These examples demonstrate differing responses to parent/school relationships. I found it particularly interesting to note the level of sentiment many participants displayed when discussing this topic. Some participants struggled to contain emotions as they spoke of parents’ encounters at school. In my field notes, I jotted down terms like “emotional, teary, angry, embarrassed, proud, confused, disappointed” as a means of describing participant expressions during discussion related to parents’ relationships with school.

Relationships between newcomer students and newcomer peers. Summarizing the ultimate social challenge of the newcomer, one participant expressed: “The hardest thing was

making friends. Friends and speaking English. If you don't speak English you have nobody. If no friend is talking learning English is slower. It's just hard. The worst part." One focus group discussed the difficulties in actually making friends. They went around the table as each responder indicated how many years it took before they felt like they had real friends: "Not in the first years. In the first years you didn't feel like it. Year three, I think." The next student said, "Year one" and the others looked surprised. A third student said "fourth year." At this point in my field notes, I wrote "4 years is a long time to be lonely" and found myself contemplating an aspect of academic acculturation I hadn't considered before – loneliness. As they continued around the table, three years emerged as the most common response.

Participants indicated other students would not talk to them as newcomers: "No. No they don't. They only talk to their friend we are lonely all the time when we first came to here." Others felt fortunate to have just one friend:

Some student are nice to me, not all but some. I have just one in the beginning. I am so happy when I finally have one friend. I am not alone for eating lunch. I am not alone for going on the bus. I have friend!

In an interesting twist, one focus group conversation centering on relationships between newcomers and national peers addressed partner work in class, noting that working with a partner meant they had to talk to each other, but it did signal friendship:

Something I don't like in other classes not ESL is when they work in partners.

Nobody wants to be partner to ESL. If I have to be a partner with them, it is really hard. Because they are irritate that I don't know anything.

In terms of how friendships directly supported learning, all participants mentioned the benefit of language practice in having friends to talk to, but no one viewed friendships as a way to

support academics. A respondent articulated, “In my country we do learning of books and learning by self. Never there is group project. Only memorize books. When teachers say it’s group project I don’t understand. My ESL friends also don’t know what it means.”

Another student said,

I had one friend that I can use for answering question in class. But not for study. Just for asking about what the teacher says. I have to do my work. My step-mom thinks I am lazy if I don’t do the work just me.

For many newcomers, their first friend was not necessarily a member of their cultural group but who was also an ESL student. A respondent indicated, “I have a friend she speaks Russian and she talk to me, she’s very nice.” Another added, “In ESL class we are all friends. Our teacher say we are family, so in ESL class it’s okay. People are very good trying to talk and make friends.”

In a similar example, one participant described his circumstances in a school with minimal diversity and no ESL program: “For a long time I was the only African. There were some other Sudanese later, but at first I was the only one. I didn’t care. But, if there were Sudanese in that school, we’d probably be friends.” When asked who his close friends were in the beginning, he said,

Mostly I’d be friends with the Hispanics. I used to enjoy being there. They would speak their little language and I would just listen. ‘Cause I didn’t even know what they were speaking. Being around them, I understood some too. So, I was learning two languages at the same time.

Describing her first friend as a newcomer, one girl told this story: “It was a boy. He speak Spanish and English, both. He talk for me and tell me things to understand. Like

translator.” Others gravitated to ESL friends because they shared some of the same challenges:

One day I made a lot of friends with people. One of my friends Somalia people she tried to say purple but she ended up saying pineapple so all of the American kids were laughing at her. I was so mad.

In explaining the gap between newcomers and Americans, participants identified language as the biggest barrier to making friends. One explained, “You had to speak English to be friends with American students.” In response, everyone around the table nodded, “Yes.” Mass agreement suggested the ESL classroom was common ground for fostering friendships: “In ESL classrooms, it was actually nice. Because most of the people that were in the class, did not speak English. So, we were on the same page.” Another student explained:

Even though you all spoke different languages...But, at the end of the day, I knew each and every one of them were not...I don't want to say dumb. But, just not speaking English. If you didn't speak English it doesn't mean you're dumb. We understand.”

A respondent described the ways in which ESL classmates stuck together because of common understanding of their difference:

Mostly, it would be our whole class of ESL that would go to lunch together. Do everything together because we didn't understand each other but from heart to heart we understood. We all knew we didn't speak English and we all knew we couldn't make friends out there.

Relationships between newcomer students and national peers. The majority of participants did not consider white classmates for potential friendship: “They are not our friends.” One student clarified the role of white students from her perspective:

Actually some of the American kids, there were a couple of kids that were really helpful. They helped me get to my classes and actually talked to me in PE or when I was eating alone at lunch they came and sat with me. Even though I didn’t know how to interact with them they still talked to me and saying hi and how is classes and showed me classes and stuff. It was there job because the teacher asked them to be helpers to new students, or the principal asked them.

In contrast, another student became friends with an English-speaking student who spoke on the newcomer’s behalf after witnessing a bullying incident:

She was a friend who talked to the principal and made sure I was okay. Even though she can’t help me like take me to other classes when I do not know how to go to my class. She would ask my other friends to take me there, my other ELL friends.

For the most part, participants understood why national peers distanced themselves, with one participant further expressing, “To be honest with you, we were different from the rest. I know that for a fact. People seen us as the newcomers—people who didn’t speak English. We were not treated the same.” Another participant said, “No one would be our friend. You can’t understand that person. Why would you try to be friends with them?”

One major exception to this mindset came from a male participant who did not have an ESL enclave in his school:

I feel like looking back now, I went to almost an all-white school. Almost all of my schools middle school and high school are all mostly white. But pretty much close. I

don't know. As long as I was telling people that back home in Africa I was named the King. I was a King. I was very popular. I was just playing around. But, they actually took it seriously. Just looking back, they loved me. I didn't enjoy school academically. But, socially, to interact with people, I loved interacting with people. I loved going to school just to talk to my friends. I was popular I guess. At home it was pretty hard. But, when I went to school, I was another person. Talking to my friends, it felt good. I had a lot of friends.

Influence of Relationships Summary

How do relationships influence academic acculturation? Collectively, the data answers the question revealing three themes of influence: relationships between newcomer parents and schools, relationships between newcomer students and peers, and relationships between newcomer students and national peers.

Relationships between parent and school were found to be complicated. Newcomer parents experiencing positive relationships with the school were encouraged to attend special events through personalized invitations and provision of translators. Positive parent involvement included attendance at cultural celebrations, supportive connections to ESL teaching staff, and flexible scheduling of conferences and meetings to accommodate parent work schedules. On the other hand, parent-school relationships were not successful when parents encountered severe communication barriers due to language, lack of comprehension due to language, or humiliation or rejection during a school visit early in the newcomer transition. These experiences parallel the descriptions of relationships of acceptance Suárez-Orozco et al. (2009) emphasized between home and school, and the relationships of rejection noted by Schwartz et al. (2007) attributing to increased acculturative stress.

Newcomer relationships with ESL and/or newcomer peers were the preferred socialization model for students attending schools with an ESL enclave. These relationships often based on common understandings and traumas and a climate of acceptance nurtured within the ESL classroom. Strong allegiance formed between newcomers, regardless of society of origin. Language acquisition was a central factor in relationships among newcomers, with conversation practice often cited as a primary social activity between friends. Several participants noted that English was not necessarily the operative language as friends attempted to learn each other's languages. This finding exemplifies Grey's (1997, 2003, 2013) pronouncement of microplurality--new Iowa schooling culture is Anglo-inverted so an array of different sub-groups might become the social representation of the new culture or a minority sub-group might serve as the mentor community for newcomer acculturation.

Newcomer relationships with national peers emerged as problematic, with language barriers a primary roadblock. Social interaction between newcomers and national peers displayed uneven dispensation of power, with the national peer often charged the task of helping, directing, or mentoring. Other examples included the model of the national peer as protector, speaking on behalf of the newcomer peer unable to speak for himself or herself. Imbalance of power was most notable in relationships characterized by bullying and mistreatment, contributing to social rejection (Gibson, 1998; Schwartz et al., 2009). While issues of social rejection were prominent in newcomer relationships with national peers, the topic of bullying proved to reach far beyond newcomer peer circles; and for this reason, a more detailed discussion of this topic has been included in the presentation of additional findings.

Additional Findings

Through an exploration of the questions pertaining to how family, culture, schools and relationships influence academic acculturation, several additional findings emerged beyond those in direct correlation to the original research questions. As participants responded to survey responses, and shared experiences during focus group discussion, common topics beyond the scope of the initial research sub-questions arose. These additional findings constitute topics presented with multiple examples from several different participants, and recurring in more than one focus group. Generally, the themes and subthemes comprising additional findings were met with agreement among participants, indicative of the essence of newcomer experience. Four additional major themes resulted from the analysis of data: newcomer mistreatment, culture shock, fear, and newcomer extremes. This section presents these important additional findings.

Major Theme 6: Newcomer Mistreatment

The mistreatment of newcomers was revealed through data exposing three subthemes: newcomer experiences with bullying, newcomer responses to bullying, and newcomer experiences with prejudice and discrimination. Experiences with bullying, prejudice, and discrimination emerged as a universal occurrence in the lives of all 18 participants.

Newcomer experiences with bullying. As participants described their experiences with derogatory treatment, the incidents ranged from blatant comments, such as “Go back where you came from,” to students reporting, “she told me I should go back to Mexico because I don’t speak English.” Emerging efforts to speak English were frequently targeted for ridicule, and teasing or mocking for mispronunciation of words was common among participants. In demeaning ways, some students were told not to speak, as a young man

explained, “One kid say to me ‘hey jungle boy.’ She say... don't talk to me until you can speak English.”

One participant offered this example of bullying behavior as she described the response of national peers when she attempted to read aloud in class:

Oh, you can't write, you can't read. You're dumb. We would be reading out loud in class. Which was really hard 'til the teacher would stand next to me and help me out. Walk me through it everywhere that I don't understand. This kid used to just sit there and make fun of me every single time I had to read. Finally, I really didn't end up going the right way ...I kind of regret too. But, I ended up slapping him.

Another student explained how peers used the language barrier as tool for entertainment, which inevitably resulted in the newcomer getting into trouble:

Like school people. They tease you like. They say a word and make you to say to teacher. The first time when they tease me with the bad word. They make me go say to the teacher. And then the teacher was going to send me off to principal, and I was like what? I don't know anything! That is just mean. You teached me something bad. Later the teacher told me. And I know, I know the meaning. It was a really bad word.

Incidents of bullying included targeting newcomers for blame to cover-up the misbehavior of other students –as seen in the earlier example of the student who as blamed for throwing candies at the substitute teacher. One student cited bullying by national peers as the primary reason for not seeking friendships with some white students:

Once people are mean it's hard to take. In the middle of class sometimes they would be mean like pinch me or poke me with a pencil. One girl told everyone I wore my headscarf because I was bald and she would go behind and pull my hijab. Which was

not really good, because it got to me. For a whole school year, we're here together.

It's like we had our classes together. Yeah every day I have to be with her in class.

During the focus groups I recorded field notes indicating the extent to which there seemed to be common agreement and affirmation from other participants. As instances of mistreatment were shared, other in the group nodded in agreement and/or stated, "me too" indicating the universality of bullying. Examples emerged in every focus group discussion, with the participants acknowledging bullying as a common to the essence of their shared lived experiences (Van Manen, 1990). While the experience of being targeted was common, newcomer responses to bullying were varied.

Newcomer responses to bullying. Participants in this study had varying responses to bullying. In examples discussed in previous sections of this chapter, students retaliated through physical aggression like slapping the offender. Some participants reported to the principal but were often hesitant, so another witness would report for them. Students used words like "scared" and "afraid" in regards to reporting their experiences. Many offenses occurred in the classroom under the watch of teachers who sometimes ignored the incident and/or failed to intervene.

One newcomer student admitted after so much frustration with bullying, she brought money to school to pay the girl to make her stop: "I just want her to stop. Once I go to school and then got money to bribe her. I'm like okay I give up, I don't want to stay like this all the time and get bullied all of the time."

Another student described her outburst in class after a bully had been teasing her. Every time she went to the teacher's desk to ask a question, one classmate would make a comment about her neediness,

She made fun of me all the time making a little baby voice “help me teacher, help me I don’t know anything.” One day I just explode, “Okay, you were born here. You’re smart. I understand, but don’t make fun of me. I was getting help!” Everyone just stared at me, like shocked that I finally stick up for myself. Even though I shouted very loud, the teacher didn’t do anything. It’s like she knows I had enough.

Another student kept the upper hand through deceit. By lying to his classmates, telling them he came from a royal family, he fostered popularity, which brought the criticism to a halt and elevated him socially.

Some students gave up trying to fit in, “I just couldn’t take it anymore so I stopped trying to talk to them and I stayed with the ESL kids. I tried to avoid the trouble.” Others avoided coming to school altogether: “After so much bad things all the time, I was feeling very bad. I didn’t want to go to school no more. I stayed home and said I was sick.”

Newcomer experiences with prejudice and discrimination. Participants presented multiple examples of prejudice and discrimination encountered in the school setting with instances ranging from subtle to blatant. Subdued examples included peer rejection and not being selected for partner tasks in the classroom. Responders in this study often felt excluded and disliked. Participants, regardless of society of origin, had similar experiences in classroom scenarios involving partners or groups. One participant said,

We had to do group work project and nobody picked me. When you have to pick a friend nobody picked me first. Me, I have to be the last one when the teacher have to assign you to a group.

Another student shared this scenario: “Yeah if partner. If the teacher say choose your partner, I’m the last one. The partner work with me don’t really like me.” A third contributor offered further description:

In those groups they feel like they got stuck with you or something. That’s really bad because you could help them, but they don’t take your advice. They don’t really listen to what you have to say, they think they’re always right because they speak English.

One student wished that her classmates would give her a chance:

They don’t think we’re smart enough. Sometimes I feel like...can you give me a chance? I know this stuff I can do it. Even though I don’t speak English like you, I can do it. I understand. I’m like just give me a chance.

As evidenced in the testimony of one participant, some newcomer students felt like the teachers were making fun of them by repeating “What? What?” when newcomer students were difficult to understand, thus drawing attention to the fact that ESL students were not communicating properly. Participants provided several examples of the way teachers responded to questions by publicly emphasizing newcomer difference. In some cases, teachers repeated the students’ questions loudly with a quizzical face, suggesting a strange question; in other cases, teachers repeated the students’ last comments slower and or louder, as though that would somehow clarify. Participants who noted these responses often expressed embarrassment by the way the teacher drew attention.

Participants provided multiple examples of encounters with prejudice and discrimination including reference to ethnic and cultural characteristics as diminutive.

Annoyed with everyone always calling her cute, one student explained:

The whole year of my first years I think. Because the way I dressed and the size of me, I'm really short. The way I talk and the way I act. American people sometimes feel like people who smile a lot or laugh a lot is weird. They say I look like a China doll, so cute. I'm not Chinese and I don't like that's all they say about me.

Some newcomer students noted instances in which their national peers would incorrectly view them as representative, as in the following example: "They turned to me one time when we were watching a video about Thailand and they all turned to me and I'm like, what? Every Asian person is not me. I don't know anything about Thailand." Similarly, another refugee student described an incident from English class:

In my English class...that was my senior year so I speak English, I was like do you think that's me? Because we had to read a story about one of the Iraqi refugee camps so they all look at me. I was like what? I'm a refugee, but I'm not that kind of a refugee. I've never been to Iraq. They were like oh I was just kidding, I was just looking. I was like okay yeah you better.

The participants in one focus group launched an interesting discussion about how prejudice can be perceived in the way people talk to each other. An excerpt illustrates the conversation:

Participant A: Have you ever experience like this? She's like an older American white lady. She was kind of speaking slowly just thinking that I really don't know English like I don't know anything. It was different.

Participant B: I know, like one of these. "DO YOU UNDERSTAND ME?" Those people... Have you had those people?

Participant C: Yeah and I hate that.

Participant D: Some people tell you because of, as a matter of fact, I'm wearing what I'm wearing [referring to the ethnic shirt he is wearing]. Like they can see maybe I just came from Africa and I don't understand what they're saying. So, before they even give me a chance to talk. As you just said, "DO YOU UNDERSTAND ME?" No, I do not understand you. I play along.

All: Laughter.

Some participants relayed stories of blatant discrimination as seen in the example of the PE teacher who called all the American students to the center of the court and allowed only white students to play for the entire class period while the ESL students watched from the sidelines. Another student reported she was discouraged from trying because of the coaches' past history with unreliable people from her culture. One student who identified as the only black person in his class said, "I joined a play one time, seventh grade. I remember that. My name was York. I was the slave."

Finally, in two of the focus groups, I noted participants using the term *FOB*. I didn't know what this meant the first time I heard it; but after hearing the term several times, I asked for clarification. One student explained, "Other students label us, they call us the FOB I guess, fresh off the boat, and that's what they all call us behind our back." Upon hearing this explanation, another participant added, "Teachers say it too sometimes. Not to your face, but when they are talking about new ESL kids." In my field notes, I posed a question: "Are teachers perpetrators of prejudice and discrimination?"

Major Theme 7: Culture Shock

Oberg (1960) identified the initial adjustment phase of newcomer transition as *culture shock*, which he labeled as the “commencement of the acculturation experience” (p.177).

While many of the factors already identified in these findings may be considered constructs of culture shock, this section identifies four specific findings expressed by teens experiencing sudden exposure to the unfamiliar Iowa culture. These subthemes include the trauma of the first day of school, time expectation, clothing, and loneliness.

The first day of school. During the focus groups, participants prominently regarded the first day in an Iowa school as overwhelmingly difficult. Participants collectively reported the common experience of being lost and/or profoundly confused as noted by one responder: “I got lost. Here we have a pretty big school. When I tried to get to my class I [went into] wrong class.” Another contributor added, “And you don’t know where you are in this building and you don’t know how to ask anybody to help ... I just showed them my schedule. I hope they take me.” A third participant explained that he was given a copy of the schedule and directed to look for the teacher’s name posted by the door of each classroom. He reported,

Lost... On the first day of school I was lost. You have to go to the second floor and the first floor there is too many different classrooms. I was looking but you have to look at the teacher name. I can’t [read it] I was looking and is all the same with lockers and doors everywhere is same... and I want [name of teacher] to take me to the right class.

She also have to teach so she asked security to take me to the class.

Moving from one classroom to another was a new concept as a refugee explained,

Yeah because when are in our camps all we have to do was stay in the class and the teacher comes to us and teaches. Here we have to go around and find the room and that's why we got lost.

Another student was so confused by the routine of the first day and unable to ask for clarification she spent most of the school day in the wrong classrooms. She provided this scenario, which admittedly happened several times during her first week at school:

When the bell rings I don't even know how to... I'm the last one in. I just stay sitting. All of a sudden the bell rings and a teacher asks me, "May I help you?" and I don't know anything. She just looked at my schedule and said to me another class. I was in the whole class period, the wrong place.

Participants explained that the first day in an Iowa school was emotionally exhausting as well. Several contributors admitted to breakdowns resulting in tears or fits of anger. One student confessed: "I cried the whole day. The first day was just crying. It's just difficult. Everything. I didn't know anything. My body hurt from crying."

One male participant admitted that his trouble with the principal began on his first day of school and set the tone for his first year:

Yeah, I got in trouble. The guy is trying to tell me but I don't know anything. So he pulls my arm to take me. I don't like that. So I get mad. I go nuts. I did get in trouble at home, too. My first day was very difficult. Just not knowing anything at all. They took me to the office because I was just mad and didn't want to day anything they were telling me... The first year sucked. Every day of the first year was no good. Confusion. Just confusion everything.

Collectively, participants shared a single sentiment on this topic: some things are difficult, and a person just has to live through it. Confirming that school does eventually get better, one participant shared about her second day:

Day one... That's the hardest day. It will be like that. The second day now, it was a different story. My mom was there to support me and told me. The second day is always better. When I went the second day it wasn't as bad as it was because I got used to yesterday, which was terrible. I had to deal with the same things almost. I did not know anything. It's like where do you start from? A, B, C. or 1, 2, 3. That's one day I would never want to experience again, but it got better every day by just a little.

I asked the participants what could be done that first day to make the transition easier. One responder replied, "I don't think you can make it better at all." Another added, "You just got to know that's the hardest thing."

Time expectations. Another challenge faced by newcomers was the time expectations of Iowa school culture. Difficulty with adjusting to time included literal time accountability. As one participant expressed:

Everything has a time. The start of school, give a time. Eating lunch, give a time. The class is a time. The work is due give a time. Before I come to Iowa, whole days I don't know what time it is. Here is very important.

Many students affirmed that in their past experiences time was more flexible, "in my family and we doing things nobody is worried about this. We begin when everyone arrive. Nobody is stress." Another student said, "Only my father has a watch. It is not needed for kids. At night you sleep. Parents tell you when we are going."

In regards to time regulations of the school day, the concept of established class periods as timed units was also new to many students. For example refugee camp schools have no time constraints as noted by one participant: “They ring the bell when the teacher is ready for us to come. The teacher is doing school a few hours maybe. Not every day. Only on days the teacher is ready.” Another student offered this stipulation “If it is raining we do not have school because there is no shelter [roof] over some areas in the part of the school. If rain stops we can have school later.”

With past experiences like these, it is no wonder the time sensitive structure of Iowa schooling requires significant adjustment. Another time consideration was the expectations of the amount of time newcomers needed to complete academic tasks or acquire skills. One participant indicated “they want us to do it right away, but I don’t know what it says and I don’t ask question. Next day is late and I am losing points.” As noted in earlier discussion of the findings contrasting the instructional approaches of general education and ESL teachers, participants found general education held unrealistic time expectations for the acquisition of English language and literacy skills. As one student commented, “They think you are two years here. You can speak English now. You can read now.” Protesting unrealistic time pressures another participant simply stated “It’s too fast. They push us too fast.”

Complications with time expectations were further exacerbated by lack of transportation. As one participant explained, “One thing [with time] is probably is the transportation. We didn’t have a ride. In [name of town] we have to walk. Sometimes we are late because of walking.” In this same discussion, another participant added, “We also walk, but first I go to the elementary school with my little brothers. They are sometimes messing around. Then I have to run to high school because I am late.” Finally, one respondent

summarized this subtheme by saying of Iowa schools, “If you don’t hit the time there is punishment.”

Clothing. Newcomer experiences with clothing brought to light another unexpected finding related to culture shock. All participants in this study came from climates warmer than the Midwest and therefore had limited understanding of dressing for the Iowa climate. One participant described her approach to keeping warm:

I remember when I came it was February and we had open shoes. Like we have like flip flop. I was wearing a sock with it so my toes were hanging out. Then everybody were laughing and I didn’t know what they were laughing at.

Another responder described the sensation of Iowa cold like this:

We have very painful skin. Everyone in my family is saying the skin is hurting.

Outside it is very much. We learn to make this pain stop you must put more clothes.

More clothes and the skin is stopping pain. Your need many clothes for this.

In response to this explanation another participant added “But in the beginning, who has more than one clothes?” as I watched others around the table nod, I was struck by gentle acknowledgement of this aspect of newcomer life. I had never before heard the sensation of cold described as skin pain, and I marveled at the remedy. Layering clothing seems so simple, but the scarcity of resources made this aspect of transition an ongoing challenge for many. As another student indicated,

Yeah I was cold, but we didn’t have any warm clothes we weren’t prepared. Thailand and Iowa, that’s so different and we weren’t prepared for it. It was really cold but other kids were just staring and then laughing. It took me awhile to realize that.

Through donations and coat drives, schools often helped newcomer families by providing winter clothing as evidenced by a participant to confirmed, “Yeah. They give coats for everybody in the school. They gave us jackets and boots.” Another student reported, “The teacher gave me gloves and a scarf for my head because it was snowing and we have to walk outside to the portables. I am going to give it back and the principal tell me to keep it.” Another participant shared, “You can go to the nurse, she has a closet and you ask for a sweater or something if you don’t have any. One time she gave me a jacket for my mom.”

Loneliness. Summarizing the ultimate social challenge of the newcomer, one participant expressed: “The hardest thing was making friends. Friends and speaking English. If you don’t speak English you have nobody. If no friend is talking learning English is slower. It’s just hard. The worst part.” One focus group discussed the difficulties in actually making friends. They went around the table as each responder indicated how many years it took before they felt like they had real friends: “Not in the first years. In the first years you didn’t feel like it. Year three, I think.” The next student said, “Year one” and the others looked surprised. A third student said “fourth year.” At this point in my field notes, I wrote “4 years is a long time to be lonely” and found myself contemplating an aspect of academic acculturation I hadn’t considered before – loneliness. As they continued around the table, three years emerged as the most common response.

Participants indicated other students would not talk to them as newcomers: “No. No they don’t. They only talk to their friend we are lonely all the time when we first came to here.”

Major Theme 8: Fear

Participant data highlight what I have termed the *fear factor* in acculturation. Participants commonly expressed feeling “afraid” to describe their early experiences with acculturation. This finding presented in three distinct categories: fear of being lost, fear of speaking out, and fear of speaking English. In addition, subtle evidence pertaining to documentation as emerged as worthy of consideration.

Fear of being lost. As evidenced extensively in participant testimony regarding the first day of school, students repeatedly expressed they were lost in the school building. Unable to read schedules or comprehend environmental texts, one responder referred to the Iowa school this way: “School is like a maze. Everything is looking same with lockers and doors. Stairs to go up and down. Upstairs same as before. I don’t know where is anything. It’s a puzzle to find where to go.”

Fear of being lost outside of the school building was also a concern addressed by several students. One participant explained,

The social worker bring us first time to school. She bring us home after. Then next time we are walking and I don’t know I am in the right street. I am looking for the big school but I can’t see it. I walk very long and I am thinking I am lost.

Fear of speaking out. This finding related specifically to reporting bullying and abuse. As evidenced in the discussion of bullying, and experiences with prejudice and discrimination as well as in the discussion of newcomer interactions with the principal, students expressed they were afraid of certain people within the school building, getting in trouble, and leaving the security of the ESL classroom. As one student said of bullying “If I say to the teacher what happened, I think it will be harder next time. I say nothing.” One

young man said, “If I talk about it, what is happening with the fighting, they will call my father. I cannot tell them. I just am not talking about it. For two years I never say what they are doing to me.”

Fear of speaking English. This aspect of newcomer experience was heavily emphasized in discussion of school academics, and the acquisition of English as the school language. Fear of speaking English was also addressed in the discussion of newcomer mistreatment. Participants reported incidents of being mocked, mimicked, and belittled for their attempts to speak. In some cases they were directed not to talk at all until they learned how to speak English properly. One participant confessed, “I was afraid to talk at all. I am tired of always no one understanding and everyone making jokes at me.” Another young woman indicated, “I am not speaking to anyone for the first year. I am just listen. I am watching what they are doing. I am afraid they will not understand me. I want to talk but I can’t.”

Documentation. Through the data collection process, omission of certain data indicated immigration status may be a consideration. For example, in the initial survey two students opted not to share their migration stories. One of these students indicated in the focus group discussion, “When I was seventeen my dad was deported.” Another student explained an early family separation this way,

When we came here it was very dangerous. When we were coming these men were helping us cross the border. After the first night we didn’t see my dad. He came to us later when we were already in Iowa.

Across the data, omission of details relating to arrival circumstance, testimony of separation during dangerous border crossing, deportation of a parent, parent imprisonment in the

country of origin, and the addition of one student's reference to having no papers indicated the possibility that some participants may be undocumented.

One participant who now works for Iowa schools shared his perspective on fear as a significant contributor to newcomer stress. He indicated this as specific to immigrants who are undocumented, and those who have had very traumatic pasts. He spoke about the students who become physically ill because they are so afraid:

They come with a lot of suspicion because they don't know. They are afraid.

Language is the big gap there [and] lots of fear. It take a long time for them to speak... Take long, take long. When it take long, a lot of damage happen to the body.

Because it's a part of trauma and it's going to stress. So I tell them [newcomer students], come out, tell your teacher. Tell us, we can help. If they cannot talk, they find depression.

Feeling afraid often prompted isolation. One participant found it easier to hide from others than to confront fear:

I think, it is like. You like to be by yourself rather than being with other people. That way, you don't want to communicate with them. Because you are afraid. I don't know maybe it is just me personally. Um, that I am afraid that I would say something wrong and they might think wrong of me. And that is something that I didn't want to deal with. Or have them correct me. I stay alone because it's better.

In my field notes, I listed the many things participants said they were afraid of.

Fear of speaking was mentioned most frequently. They were afraid of being misunderstood, asking questions, being laughed at, and reporting incidents of mistreatment. They were also

afraid of people who came to the door to collect rent and they were afraid when they had to show identification.

Major Theme 9: Newcomer Extremes

The span and range of extreme experiences is best highlighted in participant descriptions of their worst and best days in Iowa schools. Collectively, participants identified the first day of school as the worst experience in the newcomer transition. As one participant described, “Day one was the worst day of life. I was terrified. I never want to see that day again.” Building on testimony presented earlier pertaining to the first day of school, another student described her worst Iowa school day in this way:

I was afraid of everyone. I meet a person, be like nice and I think it’s okay. I will be in this room now. I cry but then it’s okay. Then it change. Another person, another room, a new person, and now we go again. I am so confuse and scared everything is changing and they are telling me but I don’t know anything. I am trying to stop crying.

One respondent compared the confusion of the first day to being deaf:

I came home crying, bawling. I just could not wait until that day was over. Oh, my gosh. It was really scary. I didn’t know anything. Didn’t know what people were talking about. Couldn’t understand. It was like being deaf, literally and sitting around people trying to read lips. You don’t know if they are talking about you. You don’t know what they are talking about.

In addition to examples of the trauma associated with those first days, participants also cited their most difficult days as those characterized by incidents of mistreatment. As revealed in the findings pertaining to bullying, prejudice and discrimination, many participants noted

their worst days as those where mistreatment became the overwhelming focus of school experience.

All participants noted they also enjoyed days marked by happy moments along the journey to adjustment. In positive reversal to the negative accounts of day one, participants shared descriptions of their best and happiest days in school. Amid challenges and struggle, the high points for newcomers were often fairly simple happenings. For one student, the memory of a middle school day that broke from routine proved memorable: “Yeah. When they took us to a park. That was a whole group. We get together and play and be like around all the students not only ELL. I liked that day. Sports and yeah... We are like little kids.”

Respondents displayed similar joy when talking about moments when teachers celebrated their accomplishments. One participant shared:

It was class where the teacher picked me. In the business department they picked me and I was really happy because the teacher actually like me. I thought that was really nice and I was really proud... Not student of the month—student of the year! I don’t know how to say it because at our school they do this thing where they pick two students in the business department and then two students in the math department.

Yeah for the top classes. Yeah I think that was probably the best day ever!

Another contributor who never expected an honor was caught off guard to hear her name called out during an assembly. She said,

I didn’t know that I would get the award but I did it. In [assembly] all of the American and Latino people they dressed up really pretty, like really professional except me, my hair is [not good]. Nobody tells me is special day. They call my name, and I’m who are they calling it’s my name? They called [student’s name], I thought it

was a different person and [teacher's name] came out and said it was me. I had to go up and get the award. I was so happy!

Four male participants referenced sports as the happiest aspect of their school years, with at least three individuals recalling positive interactions with athletic coaches. Two participants played varsity soccer, and two were track athletes. One of the athlete participants recalled,

I loved every game and tournaments. Even if we didn't win, the coach always told us we are going great and is making us strong. To talk whole games and practices and saying "good work, you are good" it's nice, you know. Better than winning. To hear it – to receive this message of positive thinking. I played for that, just to hear it.

Another athlete shared, "Track, I was good at that... I used to go out there. The whole reason is just to [be] running. I received many awards for track. We compete even relays and State. Yeah, I love that part."

For others, the happiest school events involved learning. One participant remarked, "I think my day when I meet my new ESL teacher when I was a senior." Not surprisingly, the response that really made everyone around the table smile came from one student who proudly announced, "The day you graduate! That was wonderful!"

As students shared these stories of highest and lowest memories, one brief story reflects the newcomer's heart. One young man from South Sudan shared about field trip to the zoo as the happiest memory of his first year in Iowa. His story was simple and precious:

I was like tenth grade. In [name of city] zoo they have everything from all countries like animals and everything. My English is not I am reading. I see sign "Africa" I know it says Africa. My English is not... this is like my word - Africa. They have

elephant and giraffe and lion. We stay to look everywhere in the part. I am so happy. I want to tell the teacher I am so feeling.

During the focus group exchange, I remember this participant's face just beaming as he shared this story. I was surprised looking back over my field notes not to have written any remarks regarding this account, yet I remember it well. Even now as I write this section, the emotion and joy on his face as he shared this experience makes it hard to bracket my own perceptions and sentiment.

Additional Findings Summary

Additional findings related to student experiences with bullying, student responses to bullying, and newcomer experiences with prejudice and discrimination emerged as a result of data analysis. The data revealed the prevalence of newcomer victimization perpetrated by both students and teachers in the school setting. Newcomer experiences of bullying included target behaviors such as mocking speech, making fun of cultural attire or clothing, criticizing physical racial/ethnic characteristics, verbal insults, and isolation. Experience with attitudes of prejudice include being assumed less intelligent because of language barriers, assumed representative of an entire group, assigned lower academic expectations, and typecasted. Experiences with blatant discrimination included preferential treatment of American students, isolation of newcomers, verbal insults, physical aggression, hair pulling, and inequitable allocation of resources. Finally, newcomer responses to bullying included physical aggression, bribery, deceitfulness, and withdrawal.

These findings align with existing literature identifying newcomers as targets for racial hostility (Gibson, 1998). According to Portes (2001), discrimination adversely affects the process of acculturation and poses the greatest barrier to adaptation of newcomers (Portes,

2001). Discriminatory experiences are detrimental to newcomers for many reasons. When newcomers attempt to engage in a new host society, the conflicting experiences of welcome versus rejection present significant socio-emotional concerns (Gibson, 1998; Gibson & Ogbu, 1991; Olson, 2000), which adversely influence successful acculturation.

Participants in this study had varying responses to mistreatment. Some participants adopted separation strategies to maintained connections to their ESL community but evade interactions with other cultures (Berry, 1997). In the literature, these newcomers are referred to as separatists--least likely to acculturate successfully to the school setting (Sam & Berry, 2010). Others adopted marginalization strategies (Berry, 1997) as a means for coping with mistreatment. Marginalization occurs when the newcomer fails to successfully navigate intergroup relations and therefore withdraws from the society of origin and the society of settlement, culture both groups, often due to experiencing exclusion or discrimination (Berry, 1997). The example of students who stopped coming to school altogether to avoid mistreatment illustrates marginalization.

While findings pertaining racial and ethnic discrimination are not surprising, I did not expect two aspects pertaining to this study: first, the prevalence of incidents in the individual experiences of all 18 participants; and second, evidence of general education teachers as offenders. The fact that 100% of participants experienced bullying, prejudice, and discrimination confirms racial aggression as a phenomenological factor in academic acculturation. Such high incidence rate does not occur in the literature, prompting questions about the prevalence of bigotry in Iowa schools. Research (Fisher, Wallace, & Fenton, 2000; McBrien, 2005; Ogbu, 1982; Olson, 2000) has found that cultural misunderstandings can fuel prejudice and discrimination, further complicating the challenges of students already

struggling with confusing cultural changes and unfamiliar language. This evidence prompts the question, what actions are Iowa schools taking to bridge the gap in correcting those cultural misunderstandings among both students and faculty?

Finding pertaining to culture shock included aspects that carried over from one theme to another. For example, even in the discussion of clothing, newcomers indicated being laughed at for not having the appropriate clothing or ridiculed for their clothing combinations. As one participant indicated,

When you first come you wear what they give you. If you need a shirt you go to Walmart and it's a shirt, Buy it. Like you didn't know. Its for girls, or for sleeping. It's a shirt, it covers, it's good.

In this example, the student had been teased for wearing girls pajamas. Their outfit was purchased simply because it was warm. Newcomers were not aware of clothing related protocols until much time in the new environment exposed them to the norms of American youth culture.

The span of time it took for newcomers to develop relationships was often significant so that loneliness was a common experience of transition. This finding aligns with Kirova (2001), examination of loneliness as a construct of the immigrant youth experience, most prevalent in the first three years of transition to a new culture. To combat the negative effects of loneliness in the school setting Kirova (2001) advocates for arrangement of the physical classroom space to accommodate an environment of rich social interaction, and the importance of using nonverbal communication to engage the lonely child:

Only when educators understand how immigrant children's experiences effect their quality of life and learning at school can they take pedagogically sensitive actions to

help the children develop higher self-esteem and become successful members of the school community (Kirova, 2001, p. 260).

As evidenced in past sections, participants who adopt behaviors of avoidance, evading interactions with the host culture, demonstrate the separatist response to acculturation (Berry, 1997). According to Barry (1997), the strategy of separation counteracts successful acculturation.

Through the testimony of participants in this study, analysis of qualitative data reveals withdrawal responses leading to strategies of isolation and separation—the ultimate responses to long-term fear. However, fear is not a simple construct. In the academic acculturation of teenage newcomers, a myriad of problematic happenings and negative influences in both the society of origin and the society of settlement manifests and fuels fear. Finally, newcomer extremes present the highest and lowest points of the newcomer journey, pointedly providing examples of the experiences which fuel trauma and those which alleviate the difficulties of adjustment.

Chapter four established the findings of this study through presentation of participant data. The 18 participants reported significant ways in which family, culture, schools, and relationships influenced their experience transitioning to Iowa school culture, thus addressing the four sub-questions guiding this study. In addition, the data further revealed the complexity of the teenage acculturation experience through the challenges of the newcomer migration journey to Iowa and experiences with bullying, prejudice, and discrimination encountered in the school society of settlement. Chapter five continues with further discussion of the main grand tour question guiding the study: What are the academic acculturation experiences of newcomer teens in Iowa schools? Discussion in chapter five

considers the positive and negative lived experiences of newcomer teens, recommendations for educators, and implications for future research.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND CONCLUSION

Overview of the Study

In this final chapter, I discuss the research findings as they address the overarching “grand tour” (Spradley, 1979) research question: What are the academic acculturation experiences of teenage newcomers in Iowa schools? I also present the limitations of this research, implications of the study, and recommendations. In a final reflection, I conclude by adopting a research reflexivity lens to describe my own experience with this qualitative project.

This study examined the shared phenomenon of teenage newcomer students in their lived experiences with academic acculturation to Iowa schools. Through narrative surveys and focus group discussions, the participants presented stories of personal experiences providing rich data for analysis. Prior to this study, limited research existed in the area of teenage refugee and immigrant academic acculturation to American schools, with no research specific to academic acculturation in Iowa schools. Research specific to Iowa’s newcomer teens is both important and timely due to significant migration growth over the last decade (Grey, 2013) and continual increase in newcomer population growth expected in the coming years (Federation For American Reform, 2013; Grey, 1997, 2013; Immigration Policy Center, 2013; Iowa Department of Education, 2013).

In the literature review, I explored the foundational theories of acculturation and the multifaceted array of strategies and responses imbedded with acculturation theory. I presented a review of the limited existing work pertaining to academic acculturation, which proved challenging since acculturation is typically considered a sociological, psychological,

and anthropological construct, not often investigated in educational research, with studies addressing acculturation of teens even less prevalent (Berry et al., 2006; Erikson, 1968; Garcia Coll & Marks, 2009; Suárez-Orozco, & Todorova, 2003). In regards to the four sub-questions of this study, the literature presented several prominent family, culture, school, and relationship influences on academic acculturation. Family dynamics such as separation and trauma influenced newcomer students (Suárez-Orozco, & Todorova, 2003) and parent child role reversal (Szapocznik & Kurtines, 1993), negatively impacting family structure during the acculturation experience. Research pertaining to culture found adoption of bicultural identity (Fuligni, 2001; Suárez-Orozco, 2004) as an optimal approach for successful acculturation. Sociocultural identity within an ethnic enclave was found a segregating factor which also provides a protective buffer for newcomers facing discrimination (Garcia Coll & Marks, 2009). Research pertaining to school influences found teenagers rely on service providers, staff, faculty and administrators in schools to provide important psychosocial supports for academic success and cultural adjustment (Lopez et al., 2002). In terms of relationship influences, the literature revealed relationships of acceptance (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2009) and relationships of rejection (Gibson, 1998; Schwartz, Zamboanga, & Jarvis, 2007) as two prominent branches of social experience either supporting feelings of safety and belonging or fear and mistrust. The literature review also explained Iowa's newcomer growth providing foundational background on current knowledge about refugee and immigrant new Iowans.

My approach employed phenomenological methodology to gain an understanding of participants' lived experiences (Van Manen, 1990) during their academic acculturation to Iowa schools and to describe how participants experienced this shared phenomenon

(Creswell, 2013). I adopted constructivist epistemology (Hoover, 1996) to make meaning (Jonassen, 1991), understanding that transition to a new learning environment while simultaneously entering a new culture requires newcomer synthesis of past experience and new information to create meaning. I recognized the transactional subjectivism component of constructivism, where both the object under investigation and the investigator are linked (Narayan, Rodriguez, Araujo, Shaqlaih, & Moss, 2013). In this way, new knowledge of research findings were co-created as the investigation progressed (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Through the use of focus groups and narrative survey, participants made meaning by sharing accounts of lived experience in relation to the phenomenon. Meaning making continued as I analyzed the data to find commonalities and divergence among testimonies to create an overall profile representative of the collective experience.

Eighteen individuals participated representing 10 different nationalities and 15 language groups. All participants were former students who entered the Iowa school system as refugee or immigrant newcomers during the middle or high school grades, having exited their secondary program and surpassed the age of 21. Each participant engaged in a 70-minute data collection session during which participants first completed a brief narrative survey then contributed to a focus group discussion with 3-5 other newcomers from various global origins. Data collection consisted of handwritten survey responses; verbatim transcripts of focus group discussions, and researcher field notes compiled during data collection events. I briefly introduced participants through a collective sampling of their migration stories in chapter four.

Through a qualitative open coding approach, I followed steps for data analysis based on recommendations by Creswell (2003) and Giorgi (1997) appropriate for

phenomenological inquiry. I used color band tagging to organize topics and subtopics into thematic *meaning units* (Giorgi, 1997), or what Creswell (2003) calls *chunks*. This process was far from linear as many stories represented more than one theme, requiring double coding and revealing intricate relationships among some factors in the acculturation experience. Finally, I grouped coded text into sections by color to perceive a composite picture of each aspect of the acculturation experience. These composite descriptions of what participants experienced and how they experienced it (Moustakas, 1994) provided essence of the experience Creswell (2013) points to as the goal of data analysis.

Findings pertaining to each of the research sub-questions revealed significant influence from family, culture, relationships, and schools characterizing newcomer academic acculturation. I presented those findings and respective connections to prior literature in chapter four. In this chapter, I discuss the study's grand tour question.

Discussion

My research was guided by the overarching “grand tour” (Spradley, 1979) research question: What are the academic acculturation experiences of teenage newcomers in Iowa schools? To answer this question, I created and adapted version of Berry's model of acculturation as my theoretical framework. Berry posits newcomers may have different individual responses to acculturation, balancing the value of maintaining the old culture with adapting to a new one. The choice of one response over another can change depending on shifting stressors and individual factors. Berry's model recognizes influences introduced by two sources: the newcomer's society of origin and the society of settlement. The study found the academic acculturation journey for newcomer teens in Iowa schools includes both negative and positive experiences, fueled by negative and positive realities within both home

and school societies. The next section includes a discussion of the findings presented in chapter four, grouping themes into an examination of the negative and positive experiences to describe the overall lived experiences of the academic acculturation phenomenon.

What Are the Academic Acculturation Experiences of Newcomer Teens in Iowa Schools?

As I begin the discussion of primary research question of the study, I wish to express my great respect for the 18 participants who shared their experiences. For these men and women, their teenage years adjusting to Iowa schools were wrought with fear and frustrations, but also inspiring triumphs. In an overall analysis of the data, both negative and positive experiences clearly emerge as the two competing realities in the academic acculturation experience.

Negative experiences of academic acculturation. Qualitative analysis revealed several influences from within the society of origin and the society of settlement, fueling negative experiences with academic acculturation. Negative influences included derogatory views of American education and/or American youth culture. This attitude was more prevalent where family opposition to newcomer students adopting American identity existed, manifesting in criticism of the student and/or restrictive enforcements to maintain control. Figure 5.1 presents a summary of the negative experiences that emerged through the findings of my study, including the negative influences from both society of origin, and society of settlement, encompassing aspects of both home and school experience.

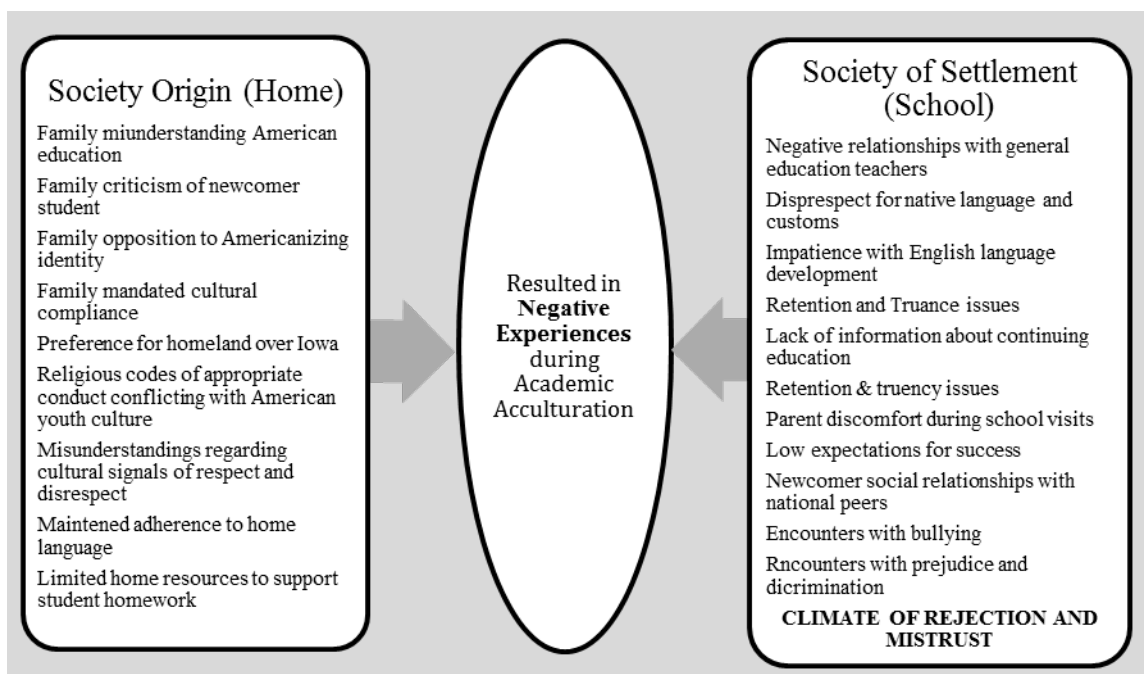


Figure 5.1. Influences Contributing to Negative Experiences During Academic Acculturation.

Not all participants enjoyed family support. Some female participants encountered significant cultural gender expectations directly conflicting with their ability to succeed in school. One female student was directed by family members to withdraw from school once she reached marriageable age. Some female students stayed home from school to care for sick siblings when parents had to work or were expected to come home over lunch break to do laundry and prepare meals. One student was forbidden participation in extra-curricular activities because of interference with family childcare needs after school, yet her brothers were supported in their involvement with the soccer team. Additionally, participants who experienced pregnancy in high school reported family members who discouraged them from continuing their education.

Additional family opposition stemmed from fear of the ways in which American culture might challenge the society of origin or promote unwanted adoption of American

identity. Religion emerged as a primary influence over newcomer ideas about appropriate conduct in terms of classroom discussion, modest dress, and gender roles. For the most part, participants in this study adhered to their religious heritage with the exception of girls who rebelled against religious dress codes in an effort appear more like their American peers. Any changes in clothing or physical appearance, straying from cultural standards or religious codes of modesty, were confronted with criticism. In these instances, parents made efforts to control the participant by subjecting clothing choices to parental approval before leaving the house. While the objective of these controls was to maintain cultural and religious traditions for modesty, participants admitted such control did not result in compliance but rather rebellion and deceitfulness. For many newcomers, fitting in at school fueled confidence to engage in the academic process; and participants garnered needed confidence by Americanizing their appearance.

All participants in the study experienced varying cultural barriers presented by both home and school influences. These barriers included parents' misunderstanding of school culture, students' misunderstandings regarding cultural signals of respect disrespect, and misunderstandings pertaining to language. In some instances, as with the practice of making eye contact when engaged in conversation, the American code of respect stood in direct contrast to students' cultural training. In the school setting, language obstacles further manifested cultural barriers.

Participants noted English language acquisition as the most challenging barrier to the newcomer experience. Once newcomers acquired enough English to successfully navigate using two languages, transition became much easier. Students saw the merit of English language exposure in general education classrooms and commented on the value of hearing

Americans speak and read aloud. Clarifications and instructions sometimes came in their native language, proving helpful; but not all participants could collaborate with another native language speaker. English language acquisition was the essential key to communicate and comprehend within school and also to accomplish schoolwork in the language of instruction. Findings in this study aligned with current research identifying English language acquisition as essential for social engagement in schools, essential to comprehension of curricular content and the primary precursor to academic success (Cheng and Fox, 2008). However, participants reported problematic expectations regarding the rapid pace at which language acquisition was expected and lack of patience displayed by teachers when newcomers were still struggling with communication and comprehension in their second year of Iowa schooling. Participants experienced complications with lack of school support at home, aligning with Stuecker's (2006) explanation of limited resources and skills available in newcomer households to adequately support student homework.

Newcomer students reported both strong and weak academic performance with some excelling in school, and others falling far behind. Yet despite academic standing, newcomers were not presented with support and guidance toward continuing education after high school graduation. Of the 18 participants in this study, only half graduated high school prior to the age of 21. Of those who graduated, only four went on to pursue post-secondary degrees. Many expressed regret that post-secondary options were not explained to them more clearly, feeling that they had missed opportunities as a result.

Many newcomer families could not foster relationships with the local school for several reasons. Parent-school relationships were unsuccessful when parents encountered severe communication barriers due to language, inability to comprehend due to language, or

humiliation or rejection during a school visit early on in the newcomer transition. These experiences parallel the descriptions of relationships of acceptance Suárez-Orozco et al. (2009) emphasized between home and school, and the relationships of rejection noted by Schwartz et al. (2007) attributing to increased acculturative stress.

Relationships of rejection extended to interactions between newcomer students and national peers. Language barrier was cited as a problematic roadblock to student socialization, but a more significant roadblock emerged. Social interaction between newcomers and national peers displayed uneven dispensation of power, as a result of school leaders positioning native Iowa student as guides, mentors, and protectors, often charged with speaking on behalf of the newcomer peer unable to speak for himself or herself. Imbalance of power was most notable in relationships characterized by bullying and mistreatment, contributing to social rejection (Gibson, 1998; Schwartz et al., 2009). While issues of social rejection were prominent in newcomer relationships with national peers, the topic of bullying proved to reach far beyond newcomer peer circles, extending to relationships between newcomer students and school faculty.

Data specific to teachers revealed a startling imbalance in terms of student perceptions of teacher helpfulness and support. Participants often perceived general education teachers as impatient, unapproachable, lacking understanding, and discriminatory. Participant descriptions revealed teachers perpetrating outright acts of racial prejudice and discrimination. As a general education teacher, I struggled to bracket my personal thoughts on this topic during data analysis. To better understand this particular finding, I revisited my data coding approach, closely scrutinizing my analysis.

In the color banding system I used to code data, I designated shades of green to represent school influences with different shades for general education teachers, ESL teachers, administrators, and school support staff. Likewise, I used shades of peach for bullying, prejudice, and discrimination. In the transcript coding, 32 instances where shades of green and shades of peach overlap emerged, indicating the relationship between themes. In five such instances, a school employee supported a mistreated student by interrupting the event and/or offering support following the event. The remaining 27 experiences included discriminatory incidents, which occurred in front of a school employee with no intervention, or events reported to school employees with no action taken, or incidents where newcomers experienced blame and/or punishment for their roles in a disciplinary event stemming from their own victimization, or blatant discriminatory comments and actions by general education teachers targeting newcomers.

The findings related to bullying and prejudice introduce an important question: why does this level of discrimination against newcomers exist in Iowa schools? Research has found that cultural misunderstandings can fuel prejudice and discrimination (Fisher, Wallace, & Fenton, 2000; McBrien, 2005; Ogbu, 1982; Olson, 2000). This prompts the question: what actions are Iowa schools taking to bridge the gap in correcting those cultural misunderstandings among both students and faculty? Until more research specific to Iowa is conducted, Iowa school officials may face difficulty in pinpointing the source of prejudice. In addition to lack of understanding of other cultures, current research surrounding prejudice and discrimination reveals mistrust as one factor that can fuel racial targeting (Hynes, 2003). Refugee newcomers may be mistrusted for fear of perceived or real political connections; thus, some newcomers may be viewed as exploitive or undeserving of services, as targets of

suspicion, or as lazy or unskilled when unable navigate employment (Hynes, 2003). Fear has also been recognized as a primary catalyst for distrust of newcomers (Stephan & Stephan, 2000; Stepick, Stepick, Eugene, & Teed, 2001).

The impact of discrimination on the newcomer causes additional concern. According to Fisher et al., “Personal encounters with overt ethnic discrimination are unavoidably linked to distress and may lead teenagers and their parents to be wary of contacts with individuals from outside their ethnic group” (2000, p. 691). In addition, past traumas encountered by newcomer children play an important role in their perception and responses to mistreatment. According to Huyck and Fields (1981), refugees are frequently victims of traumatized withdrawal as a result of exposure to violence and prolonged threat. This results in pronounced risk factors for adolescents and teens experiencing transition crises (Huyck & Fields, 1981). Huyck cautions this form of childhood stress results in greater susceptibility to depression and other mental illnesses among adolescent newcomers, a conclusion shared by other researchers investigating academic acculturation (Henley & Robinson, 2011; Suárez - Orozco, Todorova, & Louie, 2002). Literature recognizing traumatization and emotional stress in newcomers holds direct implications for the participants in this study as trauma emerged as a common experience shared by all participants. All participants experienced some form of painful family separation. Reasons for family dissection included death of a parent, imprisonment of a parent, family separation due to failed migration efforts, staggered migration because of inability to obtain documentation for all family members, itinerant employment, and separation due to impracticality of keeping overly large families safe and intact during emergency evacuations. Family separations meant that many participants in this

study entered Iowa schools grieving the absence of a family member no longer able to share the newcomer acculturation experience.

Closely related to discrimination and prejudice, research has shown issues of trust and mistrust hold significantly impacts the acculturation of refugee newcomers (Hynes, 2003). Iowa literature indicates that many newcomers arrive with traumatic histories (Stuecker, 2006). These histories may fuel mistrust as survival in oppressed nations often depends on a predictable network of trust in others, but the decision to flee threatens security (Hynes, 2003). Hynes (2003) describes, “Flight is often imminent as the refugee no longer trusts his/her own government with his/her own life...trust at the primary and secondary ontological level is lost” (p. 4). Due to hardships and mistreatment along the journey, refugees often mistrust immigration officers, government officials, uniformed officials, soldiers, and border guards; so by the time they reach the safety and asylum of a refugee camp, mistrust of officials has become a matter of survival (Hynes, 2003). Therefore, upon arrival in a new host society, refugees may mistrust everybody. The list of whom a refugee mistrusts may grow upon arriving in a new school to include school officials, support service providers, and even members of their own community perceived as different as a result of adopting characteristics of the host culture (Hynes, 2003). To better serve newcomer populations, Iowa school officials must understand past circumstances that evoke fear and recognize aspects of the Iowa school culture that may further contribute mistrust.

Volatile circumstances within the school building and newcomers’ distrust toward peers and school employees jeopardizes successful academic acculturation. This section revisited the findings of chapter four counterproductive to successful acculturation. Some negative influences include disrespect for native language and customs, impatience with

English language development, low expectations for student success, and poor social relationships between newcomers and national peers resulting in a climate of rejection and mistrust. As Valenzuela (1997) notes, “rather than building on students’ cultural and linguistic knowledge and heritage to create bicultural and bilingually competent youth in an additive manner, schools [can] subtract these identifications from youth to their social and academic detriment” (p. 326). Valenzuela describes *subtractive schooling* (Gibson, 1998; Valenzuela, 1997), which divests immigrant youth of important social and cultural resources—specifically language proficiency. Subtractive schooling manifests in disregarding the time needed to acquire language and also the importance of maintaining native language. In subtractive schooling, the focus shifts from the individual to the school. Unfortunately, the testimony of participants in this study provided ample evidence of subtractive schooling in Iowa academic acculturation experience. These factors compounded with incidence of bullying, prejudice, and discrimination perpetrated by both students and teachers creates the picture of a potentially hostile learning environments.

Thankfully, these participant experiences comprise only half the story. In addition to these subtractive aspects of the Iowa experience, participants also provided evidence of school experiences featuring individualized caring and respect for learner difference, culture, language, and academic potential. Together, these positive and negative influences reveal the true yin and yang of academic acculturation in Iowa schools. The next section presents a discussion of positive influences fueling newcomer experience.

Positive experiences of academic acculturation. This section presents further discussion on the positive highlights of the Iowa school experience. Figure 5.2 summarizes an accounting of positive influences discovered in the findings of my study. These influences

stem from both the student's home lives representing society of origin and school lives representing society of settlement.

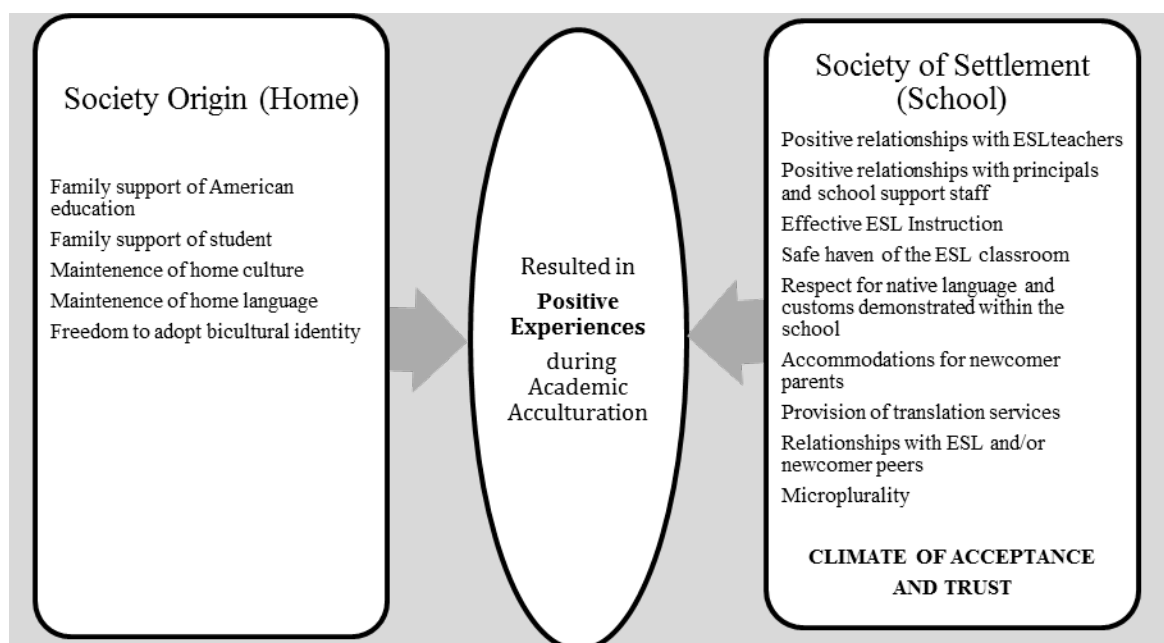


Figure 5.2. Influences Contributing to Positive Experiences During Academic Acculturation.

Encouragement from society of origin positively displayed in families where students felt supported by parents and siblings, in both their personal and academic lives. These students had family members who openly valued American education and English language acquisition and who encouraged students to focus on academics. For the most part, these families did not feel threatened by the changes as newcomer students adopted aspects of American youth culture and language. Participants who enjoyed this level of family support experienced success in forming a bicultural identity which allowed them to freely navigate both their native culture and their new culture.

Important relationships within the school environment also played a crucial role in fueling positive acculturation experiences. Participants thrived under the instruction, guidance, mentoring, and encouragement of respectful teachers, principals, and support staff.

ESL teachers emerged in this study as the foundational source of stability for newcomers in the unsteady new school environment. Participants continually cited ESL teachers as patient and understanding of the student transition. ESL instructors provided not only solid language instruction but also additional academic support for content area coursework. Overall, newcomer students reported feeling safe in ESL classrooms where language, culture, religion, and immigration status were not barriers to friendship or learning opportunities. Even after a few newcomers in this study progressed to full immersion in general education programs, some requested ESL instructors for homeroom and maintained relationships with the ESL teachers. Returning to their former ESL classrooms afterhours and before school remained a great source of academic encouragement. One participant described, “In his classroom, I felt like I could do anything. Just being in my old desk makes me feel like... strong about my work.” Participation in this study provides further evidence of the significance of relationships between newcomers and their ESL teachers: all participants came to this study through the invitation of a former ESL instructors, confirming long-term connections remained well beyond high school. However, ESL teachers were not the only school staff members to positively influence student transition.

School employees in support roles such as coaches, teaching aides, school nurses, and mentors had positive impact on students’ education in terms of non-curricular learning and socio-emotional backing. In instances when support staff were also immigrants or refugees themselves, or with shared linguistic, cultural, or religious history, the positive impact was even more pronounced. These positive relationships between school employees and newcomer students appeared to fuel motivation for learning aligning with research by

Suárez-Orozco et al. (2009) who found newcomer academic engagement increased when students experienced close and confiding relationships in the school environment.

Positive relationships between newcomer families and schools were most successful when school administrators made special efforts to initiate relationships and provide accommodations to support communication between home and school. When parents received personal invitations to school events, either through direct phone calls from a school employee or in written correspondence in their native language, family received communication positively. If school staff provided parents with options to meet for parent teacher conferences at times that respected employment schedules, attendance increased. Participants whose parents enjoyed positive relationships with the school spoke about feeling proud and happy to have their parents visit the school. These special occasions sometimes celebrated diversity through multi-cultural programs, and participants noted even small things like seeing their country's flag hanging in the commons made their families feel welcome. Translation services also facilitated stronger bonds between family and school because parents could make inquiries and gain better understanding of student progress and school expectations with fewer barriers to communication.

Collectively, these positive experiences for Iowa newcomers support the response to acculturation reported in the literature as transcultural or bicultural identity (Suárez-Orozco (2004), through which youth are encouraged to incorporate strategies from both their home culture and their new schooling culture. Newcomer students who successfully navigate both cultures freely without coercion or restriction fuse traits of both cultures in building identity as a successful member of both societies. Also referred to in the literature as additive acculturation, this combination of strategies allows for skill building of the new culture and

language as an added set of tools incorporated into the student's existing cultural repertoire (Gibson & Bhachu, 1988; Gibson & Ogbu, 1991).

This study found when influences from society of origin such as family, culture, language, and religion continue to be fostered along with growth in culture and language learning of the society of settlement, a more positive experience resulted. This finding aligns with Berry's (1997) acculturation response of *integration*, where intact and secure ties to original culture, result in intentional efforts to integrate with the host culture (Berry, 1997). As Berry (1997) predicted, participants who maintained indigenous culture and engaged in intergroup relations experienced the fewer difficulties in adaptation as they appeared able to blend the two cultures on a relational level and managed to successfully participate in both cultures. Both relationships with the school and relationships with peers indicates this outcome.

Newcomer peer relationships played an important role in positive experience. The preferred socialization model for students who attended schools with an ELL enclave involved friendships with other ELLs. These relationships often based on common understandings and traumas as well as a climate of acceptance nurtured within the ELL classroom. Common language, or shared heritage, was of little importance in these relationships; rather, simple acceptance of each other's differences and the common bond of being outsiders emerged as most important. Participants' words relating to intercultural multicultural friendships supports evidence of microplurality in Iowa schools (Devlin & Grey, 2014). The resulting affect of *Anglo-inversion* in which, according to Grey (2013), newcomers may not identify one clearly dominant culture to emulate, appeared in the experiences of students who bonded to another enclave of newcomers from outside their own heritage group.

As seen in the testimony of the African student who adopted Spanish language and social connections as his primary peer group and the Spanish-speaking participant's alliance with Russian speakers, Anglo-inversion seemed to have positive influence for at least two participants in this study. At the time of the study, many participants reported language fluency in more than one language, some acquiring those second and third languages as part of their acculturation to Iowa schools. In this study, microplurality provided participants with an array of international candidates for social engagement and proved a distinct advantage of the Iowa context. Microplural school climate was especially beneficial to newcomer students who encountered hostility from national peers who rejected and/or targeted newcomers in discriminatory ways.

In addition to a sense of belonging, positive relationships between newcomers and ELL peers supported English language acquisition. Common-language communication became a social goal, therefore promoting English language practice between friends who did not share the same native language. Participants reported conversation as a primary social activity between friends. This finding exemplifies Grey's (1997, 2003, 2013) pronouncement of microplurality, by which new Iowa schooling culture is Anglo-inverted so that an array of different sub-groups might become the social representation of the new culture or a minority sub-group might serve as the mentor community for newcomer acculturation.

Summary of positive and negative academic acculturation experiences. Academic acculturation relies on the reciprocal exchange between the newcomer and members of the host society. The positive or negative environment created during this exchange results in what I consider to be an acculturation climate. Depending on the degree of acceptance and tolerance, this environment might be one of rejection or acceptance. Similarly, the ways in which

members of the host society interact with newcomers may foster relationships of trust or mistrust.

Collectively the negative experiences influenced by the school society indicate an Iowa school climate of rejection and mistrust. Negative relationships with general education teachers, along with host society disrespect for newcomers' native language and customs, fueled a climate of rejection. This rejection was further emphasized when parents felt unwelcome in the school, and national peers rejected newcomers socially. Climate of mistrust resulted from newcomer victimization through experiences with bullying, prejudice, and discrimination.

As the findings indicated, newcomer teens navigating a school climate of rejection and mistrust adopted response strategies of separation and marginalization. This outcome aligns with the international study conducted by Berry et al. (2006) of 8,000 immigrant youth in 13 societies, affirming a strong correlation between discrimination and poor adaptation.

In counterbalance to these negative aspects of academic acculturation, participants who realized supportive relationships with ESL teachers and support staff experienced a climate of acceptance rather than rejection, and a climate of trust rather than mistrust. Climate of acceptance was further emphasized in the safe haven of ESL classrooms, and for those students who experienced respect for their native language and customs. Schools that extended warm welcome to newcomer families by providing translation services and making special accommodations for scheduling important meetings, further promoted a sense of acceptance and trust. The findings of this study indicated that an academic acculturation climate of acceptance and trust is possible in schools where intentional efforts to support strong relationships with parents are prioritized.

Comprehensively, participants engaged in meaningful, honest discussion, authentically sharing the positive and negative aspects of their lived experiences (Van Manen, 1990). These rich, thick descriptions (Geertz, 1973; Denzin, 1989) provided insight into the newcomer's story, unveiling the positive and negative aspects of newcomer acculturation in Iowa schools. If these outcomes were to be placed on a scale weighing the overall newcomer experience as positive or negative, the tipping point based on testimony of the participants in this study indicates the experience as more negative than positive. Encounters with an Iowa school climate of rejection and mistrust outweighed experiences of acceptance and trust.

From my position as a former teacher, and now a professor educating pre-service teachers, the findings from this study are both disheartening and encouraging. Saddened to learn of the difficult challenges my participants encountered, I am also deeply appreciative for the insight their experiences offer. We now have a foundational understanding of Iowa newcomer experience that did not exist prior to this study, and the thoughtful contributions of participants reveal areas where we might make improvements toward fostering a more positive climate for successful newcomer academic acculturation.

Before concluding this discussion, I wish to revisit one data collection moment that stood out as participants presented the lowest and highest points of their newcomer journeys. I vividly remember my own emotional response as the young man from South Sudan shared the story of the day he went to the zoo. I can still recall the visual image of this participant's face just beaming as he shared this story. I was surprised looking back over my field notes not to have written any remarks regarding this account, yet I remember it well. Even now as I write this section, the emotion and joy on his face as he shared this experience makes it hard to bracket my own feelings. He so reminded me of one of my past students who shared a

story in my 11th grade communications class about playing tag. My student thought the American version of our child's tag game lame because all we do is run on the ground and tap each other. He explained that in his village, the children played tag in the trees, and half the fun was the uncertainty of encountering a snake or a monkey already occupying the play zone. I remember the reaction of the other students in my class: mouths agape in awe, surprise, respect. By sharing this one small story, he opened a new way of looking at the world none of us had considered; and our minds traveled somewhere, imagining a scene so compelling it changed how we understood each other and ourselves. These encounters with newcomers challenged my own perceptions of the world and revealed my narrow understanding of the students who shared by classroom. I consider my own experiences working and learning with newcomer students positive, and they no doubt fostered my interest and commitment to this research.

Recommendations

The findings of this study point several compelling recommendations for educators. Participant testimony addressed several stakeholders in the academic acculturation process including newcomers, newcomer parents and families, ESL teachers, general education teachers, principals, and school support staff, the most compelling focus centers on recommendations for teachers. Understanding that teachers are just one entity in a network of stakeholders responsible for school climate, I present six recommendations for educators.

Recommendation 1: Gain Insight Into Personal Biases

First and foremost, if educators cannot form positive relationships with newcomer students, the other goals we establish for positive academic acculturation will be destined to fail. Before we can evoke any change in school climate, I recommend giving serious

consideration to ways we educators might gain insight into our own biases. I suspect some teachers referenced in participant testimony might be surprised, embarrassed, or regretful upon learning of the mark they left on students. Only through awareness of our own fears and misunderstandings can we confront false thinking or destructive attitudes within ourselves. Such reflection is difficult work, no doubt. Replacing old ideas with new thinking takes time. The participants in this study showed incredible grace despite their negative experiences. Even in recounting some of the ways in which they were mistreated, they did so without demonstration of anger or malice. For the most part, they were simply retelling their reality. However, from my own perspective, their reality often seemed unfair. As I reflect on participant testimony, I note small actions may have implications for big change. Simply interrupting students engaged in victimization behaviors, addressing and correcting bigoted speech, refusing to laugh along with racially cutting attempts at humor will evoke change. The examples provided by participants in this study were not really out of the ordinary; most readers could picture these exchanges and possibly even read about them with an understanding of the Iowa perspective. However, as a result of this research, and my realization of the prevalence of these behaviors, I have come to see we have a problem in Iowa schools. I encourage teachers to ask themselves to consider their role in contributing to or diminishing this problem so we might better equip newcomer students for success in every aspect of the academic acculturation process.

Recommendation 2: Develop Patience toward Newcomer Students

The surveys asked each participant how long it took them to establish basic conversational English so that they could have a conversation with a friend in English. The answers ranged from three months to two years, and the responses indicating how long it

took to read a book independently ranged from one to four years. Learning a new language, adjusting to a new culture, forming a new paradigm takes time. Educators must understand that impatience only causes students anxiety and worry that they will never meet expectations. Educators must communicate faith in the journey and patiently assure students of their progress with each noticeable improvement.

Recommendation 3: Monitor Student Progress and Schoolwork Completion

I encourage teachers to take the lead with monitoring assignment progress and completion. Teachers should pay attention to newcomer students' indicators of efficacy. Also, teachers must respect that newcomers do not feel equipped to approach educators and therefore, for awhile anyway, teachers can help by taking the lead and checking in with them regarding their schoolwork. Indeed, resources to support homework are almost non-existent in many newcomer households; thus, school time may be necessary to complete tasks. Self-regulation and self-advocacy are noble attributes but not acceptable student practice in many parts of the world. Newcomer students need much interaction and communication regarding academic expectations before they understand and put to practice this aspect of secondary school responsibility, which may stand in direct contrast to previous models of school behaviors.

Recommendation 4: Learn About Cultural Backgrounds of Newcomer Students

Teachers should learn about the countries newcomers have lived in, the languages they speak, the members of their family, and their educational aspirations. During this study, I was humbled by participants' gratitude. I thought they were giving me an incredible gift by sharing their stories for my research. But, as one after another said, "thank you," I began to learn many of them had never been asked to tell their story. The boy from Sudan fled with

his father in the middle of a fire attack, lost his mother, his siblings, his home, and his village in one night. During his Iowa school experience, he never told anyone that his father's wife was not his mother or that he desperately missed the members of his family who stayed behind. Instead, he kicked and punched and fought his way through school because he didn't know how to express the pain of his loss. Upon further reflection, I believe participants expressed thanks because they experienced a type of release when admitting transition was hard. Some participants indicated our discussion brought to mind details they had forgotten, and the focus group provided opportunity to reflect on how far they had come. One participant admitted our focus group conversation made him want to go back to school. None of these sentiments are praise for qualitative research, but rather evidence of meaningfulness in a person being asked to tell his or her story by someone who really wants to know the person's history and cares about his or her future.

Recommendation 5: Learn Effective Instructional Modifications and Accommodations for Language Learners

Not all teacher preparation programs provide specialized training for meeting the educational needs of ELL students. Teachers need learn as much as possible about effective instructional modifications and accommodations for language learners. Students lacking core communication skills are not able to navigate secondary grade level curriculum without support. Participants in the study indicated distinct differences in the ways ELL and general education teachers presented information, including the helpfulness of expressive gesture, animated facial expression, visual tools, and appropriate time to complete tasks. Participants also provided insight into the problematic aspects of group work and partner groupings. Understandably, educators with specialized ESL training possess a repertoire of instructional

strategies for supporting language learners. General education teachers are strongly encouraged to network with ESL educators to determine what recommendations already exist that might support stronger pedagogical delivery of content for newcomer students.

Recommendation 6: Consider Flexible and Innovative Approaches to Fostering Relationships with Newcomer Families

As this study found, the relationship between home and school can be compromised when parents are made to feel uncomfortable and/or unwelcome or confused upon visiting the school. Data showed parent support greater when schools made special accommodations to foster improved home/school communication, extended invitations to multicultural celebrations, and offered flexible scheduling of critical meetings respective of newcomer parent employment commitments. I encourage collaboration among school stakeholders and ESL instructors in planning for proactive approaches to fostering positive relationships between newcomer families and the school.

Implications for Future Research

Based on the findings of this study--the first inquiry of its kind in Iowa--significant gaps still exist in what we understand about academic acculturation in Iowa schools. The 18 participants in this study provided Iowa's first descriptive picture of the teenage newcomer experience and, in doing so, revealed strengths and weaknesses in the Iowa learning climate. Since I am an educator, throughout this project I envisioned teachers and others wielding influence in the school society as my ideal reader. Now my professional life has extended to post-secondary teacher education, I see potential to enhance several areas of pre-service teacher training and professional development for current teachers. The list of recommendations provided within is not comprehensive. I have focused specifically on

implications for research in support of better informing educators so those who currently work in schools and those preparing to work in schools will be better equipped to support the success of newcomer students and create a climate of acceptance within Iowa's schools. To that end, I offer five recommendations for future research.

Research Area 1: Equitable ESL Programming in Iowa Schools.

While entirely coincidental, all the participants in this study attended schools in districts with the largest LEP student populations (represented in Table 1.2). Therefore, I was surprised to learn three participants arriving in Iowa with zero English language ability reported receiving no ESL instruction. To what extent are quality ESL programs and newcomer support services equitably provided across Iowa?

Research Area 2: Non-English Proficient Newcomers Selected for Special Education Services in Iowa Schools.

This study included three participants who received special education services in lieu of ESL programming. One participant explained his IEP was behavioral, and the others did not provide rationale for this aspect of their Iowa education. Existing literature includes focus on non-English proficient students inappropriately selected for special education services (Azubiaga et al., 2009) and incidence of placement in low academic track programs (Allen & Franklin, 2002; Suárez-Orozco, 1989; Trueba, 1990). However, no research specific to Iowa exists at this time. In order to qualify for special education (SPED) services in Iowa, one does not receive a label specific to the federally defined categories within IDEIA. According to a professor of Special Education at Buena Vista University, we must provide evidence the learner's performance is specifically behind that of same-age peers and not the result of lack of exposure to appropriate education or a language barrier (K. Strohmyer, personal

communication, April 2, 2015). While it was heartening to see all the students in this study were served under one program or another, both the student and the service provider may experience challenges when the expertise of both special education and ESL is needed. The existence of language barriers and teachers who lack experience in addressing the unique needs of a population of students who may require the services of both ESL and SPED causes significant difficulty in sorting out true existence of some disabilities (K. Strohmyer, personal communication, April 2, 2015). Further research on this topic is especially timely in light of the Iowa Department of Education's current special education endorsement initiatives and training needs under consideration. As new models of teacher preparation focus on more in-depth exploration of exceptionalities, programming, and student characteristics, collaboration between special education and ESL fields has the potential to address some questions presented in this study. Therefore further research on the topics of ESL and SPED programming pertaining to newcomer placement is a concern.

Research Area 3: The Role of Non-Academic School Employees in Newcomer Academic Acculturation.

Lopez et al. (2002) points to the need for further research looking at acculturation and the social supports offered by school employees. Participants in this study reported support staff offered mentoring on personal hygiene, parenting skills, social cues, and American fashion: topics far removed from the curricular core yet seemingly essential to successful newcomer transition. Participants reported positive academic experiences as a result of interactions with support staff speaking their native language or school employees who were refugees themselves and more understanding of newcomer adjustment. None of these

individuals were faculty, yet their impact appears significant; therefore, I recommend further investigation on the role of non-academic school employees.

Research Area 4: Bullying, Prejudice, and Discrimination of Iowa Newcomers.

Additional research on the topic of newcomer bullying, specifically pertaining to Iowa secondary schools is strongly recommended. As a result of the findings in this study, several topics worthy of scholarly inquiry arise. A general inquiry on the topic of bullying, prejudice, and discrimination in Iowa secondary schools is needed in addition to research pertaining to climate of acceptance versus climate of rejection in Iowa secondary schools. In addition, this study revealed the need for greater understanding of cultural sensitivity training in microplural communities: specifically studying opportunities for professional development currently offered to licensed Iowa teachers to equip their understanding of newcomer student backgrounds and needs. Similarly, researchers may ask how Iowa teacher education preparation programs address cultural diversity. Finally, Iowa schools will benefit from studying proactive measures taken to support newcomer students and prevent incidents of bullying, prejudice, and discrimination. Research into training opportunities available to school administrators to help in handling the legal, psychological, and social implications of newcomer experiences with bullying, prejudice, and discrimination will also benefit Iowa schools. Research addressing any of these topics and questions seems relevant to the current climate of newcomer acculturation in Iowa schools.

Research Area 5: Replication of This Study with Teacher Participants.

In the comprehensive model of acculturation, Berry (2003, 2005, 2006) asserts change occurs in both the newcomer and the host society. Berry's acculturation model infers academic acculturation of newcomers also results in changes to the school society. Asking

educators to share their lived experiences with academic acculturation will provide a more comprehensive picture of the academic acculturation phenomenon in Iowa schools. I propose such a study could be successfully initiated using the same data collection tools and research questions posed in this study. The findings of this study revealed discrepancies in the newcomer experience of acceptance and/or rejection within school and relationships of trust and/or mistrust with school employees. To address incongruities in relationships between newcomers and various school stakeholders, future study to engage participation of principals, general education teachers, ESL teachers, and support staff may provide worthwhile insights.

Conclusion and Researcher Reflexivity

Literature related to academic acculturation at the high school level is limited; and prior to this study, literature specific to Iowa teenage newcomers did not exist. Despite the paucity of research, the phenomenon of academic acculturation grows increasingly important due to Iowa's ongoing growth of newcomer populations. I engaged in this study to add qualitative evidence to the story of academic acculturation in Iowa secondary schools from the perspective of past students who lived the experience. My research further expanded the literature by giving new application to Berry's model of acculturation in regards to the dual influence of society of origin and society of settlement. I accomplished this specifically by investigating the influences of family, culture, relationships, and school in the Iowa context.

My research was guided by the "grand tour" (Spradley, 1979) research question: What are the academic acculturation experiences of teenage newcomers in Iowa schools? The resulting answer to that question was riddled with positive and negative experiences and challenges, demonstrating various newcomer strategies and responses to the phenomenon. By

unveiling the *lived experiences* (Van Manen, 1990) of Iowa's teenage newcomers, I hoped to discover and present a story not yet told in the literature. In this process, several aspects of that untold story surprised me.

All participants provided their home country, but two participants indicated the name of the refugee camp where they were born: "Thailand – Mae La Refugee Camp" and "Thailand – Karenni Refugee Camp 1." Prior to this study, I envisioned circumstances leading up to migration as potentially traumatic, but conditions of urgency were always part of my imaginings. I never realized some newcomer families had to wait decades for their names to be called, with waiting lists so long and national climates so volatile that entire generations were born and raised in the camps while hoping for migration opportunity.

Prior to this study, I had noticed distinctive differences in the disposition and motivation of refugee students compared with immigrant students; and I suspected the importance of understanding these differences. My study showed distinct and notable differences between refugee and immigrant newcomers. Refugees had more assistance up front in terms of resources, transitional support, and government documentation but lagged behind in their understanding of American culture and academic expectations. Immigrant newcomers in this study seemed more aware of American ideals but struggled with securing resources and/or employment; and for some, documentation toward naturalization proved incredibly complex. While this study did not specifically address illegal immigration, omission of details relating to arrival circumstance, testimony of separation during dangerous border crossing, deportation of a parent, and imprisonment in the country of origin left an impression indicating the possibility that some participants may be undocumented. Despite these differences between refugees and immigrants, newcomers continually reported they

preferred as friends other non-English speakers, regardless of background. Initially, I suspected vast differences, particularly noting the literature on refugee trauma. However, through this study, I learned both groups experienced trauma through family separation, violence, and death of loved ones. Both refugees and immigrants shared the difficult transitional experience of navigating a new society without language skills, and both groups were equally targeted through acts of bullying, prejudice and discrimination.

Finally, while I intended to hold to Moustakas (1994) idea of bracketing, setting aside my own experiences to approach the phenomenon with a fresh perspective, I found Creswell's (2013) admission to be true; removal of self is hard to achieve. Just as the constructivist epistemology of this study implies, I remained actively involved in meaning making throughout every stage of the research. Participants actively constructed new understanding of the academic acculturation individually and collaboratively (Brooks & Brooks, 1993; Duffy & Cunningham, 1996) through personal reflection, storytelling, and focus group discussion with others newcomers. In my analysis of the data, I constructed new knowledge and understanding by blending new information provided by the participants with preexisting knowledge gleaned from the literature (Cooper & D'Inverno, 2004; Woolfolk, 2012) and my personal experience. The relationship of transactional subjectivism was integral to this study as both the object under investigation and the investigator were linked (Narayan et al., 2013). I became keenly aware of the impossibility of complete bracketing during one focus group session when a participant who was referring to "white people" shifted his gaze away from his conversation partner and turned his focus on me, changing his subject indicator to "you guys." He continued to refer to me using "you guys" whenever he indicated thoughts or attitudes pertaining to whites. I had a similar experience in another

focus group with students referencing general education teachers and referring to me through gestures indicating I was representative of that group. While the participants meant no disrespect, I felt particular discomfort with the suggestion that I represented all white people, or all teachers, given the negative findings regarding participant experiences with rejection and mistrust.

To close, I am humbled by the honesty with which participants shared their richly insightful and, at times, painful experiences. I am grateful to each of the 18 participants for his or her contribution in the co-creation of this new knowledge. I understand neither the participants nor the researcher could create such meaning independent of the other and that understanding the academic acculturation experience of teenage Iowa newcomers would not be possible without this remarkable partnership. Together we gave voice to a vulnerable population who until now have been significantly misunderstood and often mistreated. Going forward, I trust the findings of this study and recommendations for future inquiry will lead to a greater understanding in order to equip Iowa educators to successfully support teenage newcomers through their academic acculturation to Iowa schools.

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Appendix A: Institutional Review Board Approval Letter

Institutional Review Board
2507 University Ave, Des Moines, IA 50311
irb@drake.edu



Date: **11/06/2014**
From: Lisa A. Gardner, IRB Chair
To: Calle Friesen
Re: **IRB Proposal #2014-15004**

Your expedited application for research titled "The Academic Acculturation Challenges of Immigrant and Refugee Teens in Iowa Schools," has been reviewed and has received **approval**.

The approval period is from **11/06/14 to 11/05/15**.

If any changes are made to the protocol or if you plan to continue the study beyond the approval date, notify the IRB. Should you intend to continue your study beyond the approved time period, please submit an application to the IRB no later than **one month before the expiration date** to ensure compliance and continued data collection. Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Lisa A. Gardner".

Lisa A. Gardner, PhD.
Professor, Robert F. Stein Term Fellow in Enterprise Risk Management
IRB Chair

Appendix B: Student Participant IRB Consent Form

INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT

Title of Study: The Academic Acculturation Challenges of Immigrant and Refugee Teens In Iowa Schools: A Qualitative Phenomenological Study of Teacher and Student Perspectives

Investigator: Calle Friesen

Participant Group: Student

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this research study is to learn more about the experience of refugee and immigrant students during the years of academic acculturation in Iowa public schools. You are being invited to participate in this study because of your experience as a refugee or immigrant student who transitioned to Iowa schools during your middle school or high school years. Please take your time in deciding if you would like to participate. Please feel free to ask questions at any time.

DESCRIPTION OF PROCEDURES

If you agree to participate, you will be asked to engage in a focus group discussion involving three separate contacts:

- I. The initial contact will be an introduction to the researcher and an opportunity to ask questions about the study. This contact may occur through direct contact with the researcher, or through a mentor known to the participant. During this contact we will schedule a date, time, and location to meet to conduct the focus group. This first exchange may transpire over telephone, email, or face-to-face.
- II. The second contact will be a 60-90 minute focus group meeting, which will include an overview of the plan for the meeting, participation in a brief written survey, and a group discussion involving other individuals with similar schooling experience.
- III. The third contact will include a “member check” where the researcher will share the focus group transcriptions for your consideration and you will have the opportunity to clarify, amend, or ask further questions as a follow-up. This third contact is entirely optional and only presented to those providing an email address for this purpose.

Your participation will last for only the three contact exchanges described above. The focus group meetings will be scheduled at dates, times, and locations determined during your initial contact with the researcher. The entire study will conclude by December 14, 2014.

RISKS

While participating in this study, it is highly unlikely that you will encounter physical, psychological, or legal risk of any kind. As with any study regarding personal narrative, there is a possibility of minimal emotional risk or ethical dilemma associated with disclosing personal sentiment. Every precaution will be taken to ensure minimal risk.

BENEFITS

If you decide to participate in this study you will be financially compensated in the amount of \$25. It is hoped that the information gained through this inquiry will benefit Iowa educators by providing valuable insight into the experiences of refugee and immigrant students acculturating to Iowa schools. The information may serve to better understand unique needs of refugee and immigrant students and promote improved approaches for fostering their academic success.

PARTICIPANT RIGHTS

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary and you may refuse to participate or leave the study at any time. If you decide to not participate in the study or leave the study early, it will not result in any penalty. You have the freedom to decline any question that you do not wish to answer.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Records identifying participants will be kept confidential to the extent permitted by applicable laws and regulations and will not be made publicly available. However, federal government regulatory agencies, auditing departments of Drake University, and the Institutional Review Board (a committee that reviews and approves human subject research studies) may inspect and/or copy your records for quality assurance and data analysis. These records may contain private information.

To ensure confidentiality to the extent permitted by law, the following measures will be taken: your identity will be kept confidential and any identifiers (such as name, place of residence, school enrollment, etc.) will be replaced with pseudonyms in the interview transcripts. All documentation of the interview will remain in the private computer files of the researcher. Parties likely to view the data include the Drake University supervising professors serving on the researcher's dissertation team. The data collected will be securely retained for a period of no longer than five years. If the results of the study are published, your identity will remain confidential.

QUESTIONS OR PROBLEMS

You are encouraged to ask questions at any time during this study.

- For further information about the study please contact the researcher (712) 299-5862, or the Drake University supervising faculty member jill.johnson@drake.edu (515) 271-3992.
- If you have any questions about the rights of research subjects or research-related injury, please contact the IRB Administrator, (515) 271-3472, IRB@drake.edu, Drake University, Des Moines, Iowa 50311.

PARTICIPANT SIGNATURE

Your signature indicates that you voluntarily agree to participate in this study, that the study has been explained to you, that you have been given the time to read the document, and that your questions have been satisfactorily answered. You will receive a copy of the written

informed consent prior to your participation in the study.

Participant's Name (printed) _____

(Participant's Signature) (Date)

NOTE: *The title of this study was amended following data collection, thus explaining the differences in title text of the study title as presented on this consent form.*

Appendix C: Student Participant Survey Tool

“Academic Acculturation Study” Student Survey Questions

1. Where were you born? (Country) _____

2. List all of the languages you speak.

3. How old were you when you came to Iowa? _____

4. What grade were you placed in when you came to Iowa?

<input type="checkbox"/> 5 th grade	<input type="checkbox"/> 9 th grade
<input type="checkbox"/> 6 th grade	<input type="checkbox"/> 10 th grade
<input type="checkbox"/> 7 th grade	<input type="checkbox"/> 11 th grade
<input type="checkbox"/> 8 th grade	<input type="checkbox"/> 12 th grade

5. Before coming to the US, how many years of school did you have?

<input type="checkbox"/> 0 years (no school)	<input type="checkbox"/> 7 years
<input type="checkbox"/> 1 year	<input type="checkbox"/> 8 years
<input type="checkbox"/> 2 years	<input type="checkbox"/> 9 years
<input type="checkbox"/> 3 years	<input type="checkbox"/> 10 years
<input type="checkbox"/> 4 years	<input type="checkbox"/> 11 years
<input type="checkbox"/> 5 years	<input type="checkbox"/> 12 years
<input type="checkbox"/> 6 years	<input type="checkbox"/> I don't know

6. How long did it take you to talk with friends in English?

<input type="checkbox"/> 0-6 months	<input type="checkbox"/> 3 years
<input type="checkbox"/> 1 year	<input type="checkbox"/> 4 years
<input type="checkbox"/> 2 years	<input type="checkbox"/> More than 4 years

7. How long did it take you to read a book in English?

☐ 0-6 months

☐ 1 year

☐ 2 years

☐ 3 years

☐ 4 years

☐ 5 years

☐ 6 years

☐ More than 6 years

8. Did you graduate from high school?

☐ Yes A what age? _____

☐ No

9. Did you take classes after high school?

☐ Yes What school did you go to? _____

☐ No What did you study? _____

11. Describe how you came to Iowa.

Appendix D: Student Focus Group Discussion Prompts

Student Focus Group Discussion Question Prompts

Depending on participant engagement, simply providing the discussion prompt (example: “Discuss Teachers” or “Discuss Relationships” may be sufficient to generate quality focus group dialogue. The sub-questions provided will be utilized when prompts alone do not generate sufficient presentation of meaningful data. The scope of topics intentionally begins with general concepts, somewhat distanced from the participant and gradually moves towards more personalized inquiry.

Depending on the English proficiency of student participants, some questions may be rephrased by the focus group leader to support understanding. Rephrasing options are indicated in green text.

Discuss Community:

- To what extent do local social and welfare services support you and your family?

How did you get help in town?

Who helped your family in town?

Discuss School Leadership & Administration:

- Did you ever interact with the school principal? Please share your story.

Tell me about your principal.

Did your principal talk to you?

- What supports and resources were available in your school to help you with other needs, beyond academics?

At school, who helped you with personal needs?

At school, who answered questions about jobs, or sickness, or rules?

Discuss Teachers:

- Describe your working relationship with the ESL teacher

Tell me about your ESL teacher.

- Describe your working relationship with general education teachers

Tell me about your other teachers.

- How did teachers help you succeed?

How did teachers help you?

- How did teachers hinder your success?

How did teachers make it hard for you?

Discuss Relationships Among Students:

- Describe the “social acculturation” process. What was your social experience with other students as a newcomer with limited English?

How did other students talk you?

What languages did you speak in school?

Did other students speak your language in school?

Did anyone make you feel bad about your English?

- Do you feel there is a difference in the experience of male and female students with limited English?

Is school different for boys and girls?

Discuss Family:

- To what extent did your family impact your transition to school?

Tell me about your family

How does your family feel about your Iowa school?

Discuss Refugee & Immigrant Experience:

- What do you view as the difference between refugee and immigrant?

Are you a refugee?

Are you an immigrant?

- What are some pressures refugee and immigrant students face in school?

What was hard about school?

- What are some pressures refugee and immigrant students face outside of school?

What was hard about Iowa?

- Describe the “climate of acceptance.” How are refugee and immigrant students treated by the rest of the school community?

Did you feel accepted at school?

Did people at school like you?

How did people at school treat you?

- Did you ever experience prejudice or discrimination at school? Please share your story.

Was anyone mean to you?

Was anyone rude to you?

Discuss Challenges:

- What would you say are the biggest challenges faced by refugee and immigrant students in Iowa schools?

What is the hardest thing about Iowa school?

- What supports or resources were missing in school, but clearly needed?

What did you need?

If you got a magic wish for school – what would you wish for?

Discuss Personal Experience:

- Describe your worst Iowa school experience.
- Describe your best Iowa school experience.

Closing Advice:

- What advice would you give to a newcomer student?

What do you wish you knew at the beginning?

- What advice would you give teachers?

What do you want teachers to know?

- What advice would you give to parents of newcomer students?

What do you want parents to know?

Appendix E: Transcription Code Key

Student Participant Focus Group Data Color Codes

Family Codes

- Family Separation
- Family Support
- Family Lack of Support
- Family Control

Relationship Codes

- Relationships Between Parent and School
- Student Marriage & Family (Parenting)
- Relationships Between Students and Peers

*Relationships Between Student and School Employees (*Included in School Codes*)

School Codes

- General Education Teachers
- ESL/ELL Teachers
- Administrators & Superintendents
- Support Staff
- Disciplinary Issues
- IEP
- Homework & Assignments

Discrimination Codes

- Bullying

- Newcomer Response to Bullying

- Attitudes of Prejudice

- Acts of Discrimination

Language Codes

- Native Language

- English Language Acquisition

- Bicultural Identity

- Translators

Culture Codes

- Homeland preference

- Religion

- Culture Barriers

- Cultural Cliques

Other Emerging Theme Codes

- Time Expectations

- Clothing

- Poverty

- Fear & Loneliness

- Documentation

- Trauma

- Television & Internet

- Church, Charity & Social Services

- Transportation

Student Focus Group Codes Expanded

Family Codes

- Family Separation

- Separated in Immigration Process
- Death of Parent
- Migrant Working Parents

- Family Support

- Siblings Support
- Parent Support
- Positive Views of American Education

- Family Lack of Support

- Criticism of Student
- Negative Views of American Education

- Family Control

- Insistence on Cultural Dress
- Insistence on Cultural Gender Roles

Relationship Codes

- Relationships Between Parent and School

- Parent Teacher Conferences
- Culture Days
- Telephone Communication
- Language Challenges
- Collaboration with ESL teachers

- Student Marriage & Family (Parenting)

- Arranged Marriage (Muslim Culture)
- Teen Pregnancy (4 female participants are single parents)

- Relationships Between Students and Peers

- Relationships with Other Newcomers
- Relationships with National Peers (non-ESL Iowa peers)

Relationships Between Student and School (*Included in School Codes*)

School Codes

- General Education Teachers

- Rapid Pace of Content Delivery
- Don't Understand Newcomer Questions When They Ask
- English Only
- Lack of Understanding of:
 - Acculturation Timeline
 - Language Acquisition Timeline
 - Refugee Camps & Limited School Experience

• ESL/ELL Teachers

- Safe Haven in the ESL classroom
- Respect for Native Languages & Customs
- Most Understanding

• Administrators & Superintendents

- Positive Relationships
- Indifference or No Relationships

• Support Staff

- The School Nurse
- Special bond with school staff identifying as refugee or immigrant
- Parenting Classes

• Disciplinary Issues

- Truancy
- Behavior Problems

• IEP

• Homework & Assignments

- No Support for Schoolwork at Home
- Limited Understanding of What to do Independently

Discrimination Codes

• Bullying

- Mocking speech
- Mocking attire/clothing
- Criticizing physical/racial/ethnic characteristics
- Verbal insults
- Isolation

• Newcomer Response to Bullying

- Fist Fights
- Bribery
- Withdrawal

- Deceitfulness

- Attitudes of Prejudice

- Assumed less intelligence because of language barrier
- Assumed dangerous because of national origin
- Assumed representative of entire group
- Lower Expectations
- Typecast as the “slave” in school play

- Acts of Discrimination

- Preferential Treatment (of whites)
- Isolation of Newcomer

Language Codes

- Native Language

- English Language Acquisition

- Frustration with Language Barriers
- Importance of Gestures & Facial Expression

- Bicultural Identity

- Microplurality & Segmented Assimilation

- Translators

Culture Codes

- Homeland preference

- Religion

- Muslim Practice (Wearing Hijab, Arranged Marriage)
- African Tribes (Plural Marriage = Children have several mothers)

- Culture Barriers

- Understanding signs of respect & disrespect (eye contact)
- Male dominance cultures (attitudes toward female teachers)

- Cultural Cliques

Other Emerging Theme Codes

- Time Expectations

- Expectations of rapid language acquisition
- Expectations of timely arrival & adherence to schedules

- Expectations of timely assignment submission

• Clothing

- Winter & Climate Clothing
- Heritage Clothing
- American Clothing
- Color Rules for Males & Females

• Poverty

- Hunger
- Employment
 - Custodian labor (including hotel maids)
 - Manufacturing labor (assembly line jobs)
 - Slaughterhouse labor

• Fear & Loneliness

- Afraid to speak
- Afraid to speak English
- Fear of being lost
- Fear of being alone

• Documentation

- School Records
- Citizenship & Immigration Records

• Trauma

- Newcomers needing therapy & counseling
- Circumstances of homeland exit
- Refugee Camps

• Television & Internet

- To understand language
- To understand fashion
- YouTube videos (how to dress American)
- YouTube videos (how to apply make-up)

• Church, Charity & Social Services

- Sponsor supports (Refugee Organizations & Sponsor Families)
- 4 month limit
- Assigned Caseworkers

• Transportation

- Shared rides and/or shared vehicles
- No transportation
- Complications in winter weather

- The First Day of School in Iowa
 - Worst Day of My Life
 - Being Lost and Fear of Being Lost
 - American Toilets